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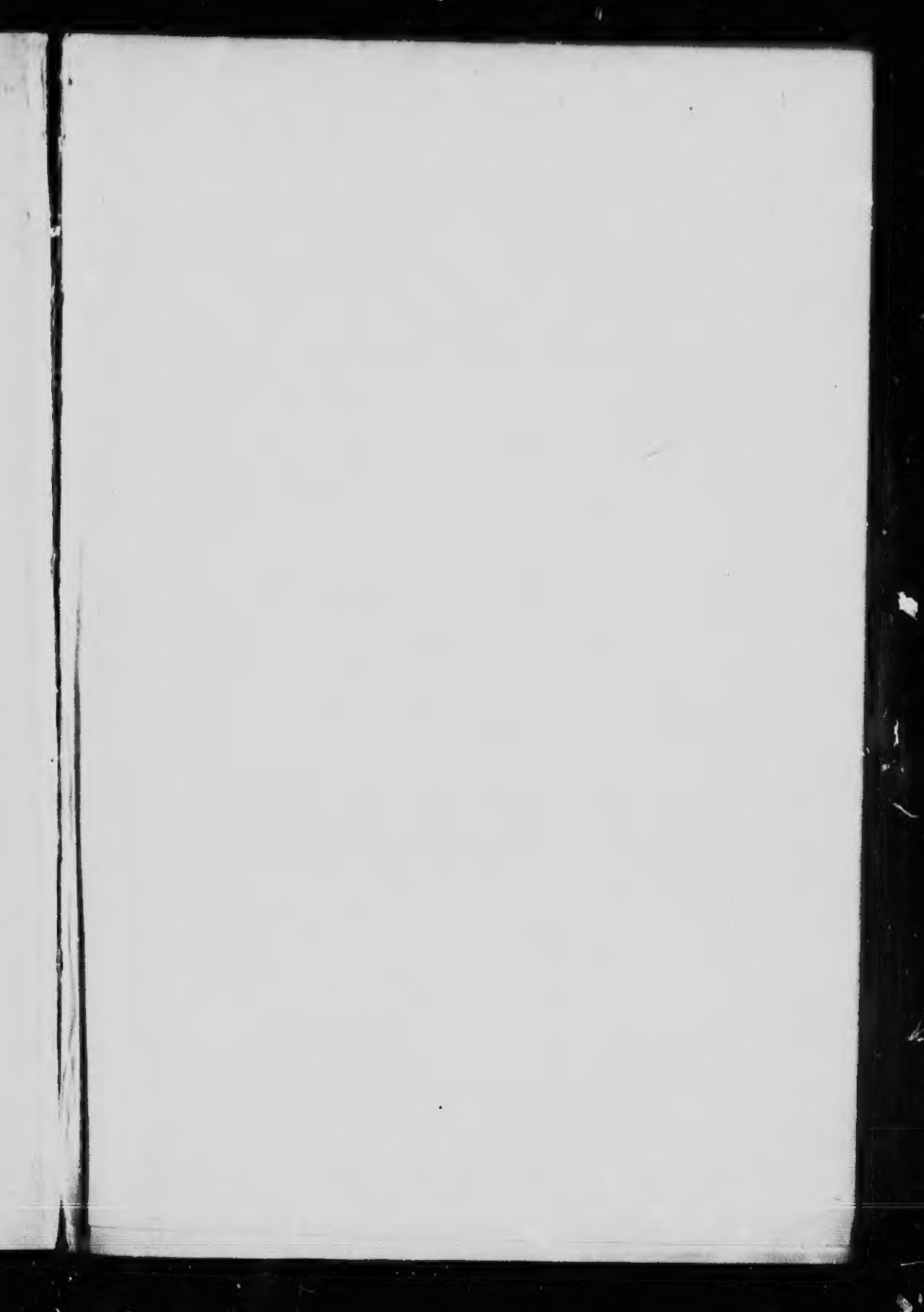
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THE PRICE OF LIS DORIS

THE PRICE OF LIS DORIS

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS

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TO MY FRIENDS AMONG
THE PAINTERS,
IN THE HOPE THAT THEY WILL
LIKE A TALE ABOUT
A PAINTER,
WHICH SAYS NOTHING ABOUT
PAINTING.

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FIRST:

I

LIS DORIS came trudging through the spring morning-mist. The clouds—

No, this is the wrong way to begin. Lis Doris himself, in his honest life-effort, would have been the very first to tell us so. The facts that men grasp do not loom up suddenly from beyond an untouched horizon. We build and we climb. And the firmament we all aspire to rests on great square pillars embedded in the hard brown earth. We climb and we build. Lis Doris knew that. And about the hard brown earth. With a crick in his neck from reaching to the stars.

Lis Doris was born in the village of Boldam, on the fifth of December 1861. He has been known to say it was the sixth of the month, but not if you asked him to make sure. He always took such small note of figures, especially in connection with himself. But the reference books all give the fifth, and the reporters have looked out the date in the parish register. Lis confounded the eve and the feast of Santa Claus. Either of them forms an unfortunate coincidence for a Dutch child's birthday, a confusion of presents on the great children's-feast of the year. That you get very little is no reason to make it less.

The reporters have looked out the date in the parish register. Such a flat little, dull little parish of less than a thousand souls! Barely rising above the sky-line on the

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trackless Overijssel heath. Grey in grey, right and left, for ever. Grey in grey, as the slow days lengthen, under the grim, grey sky.

His father was a really religious grocer. An arduous profession for those who do more than profess. Productive of hard times here below and a possible compensation above. Too well known is the Calvinist tradesman who bids his apprentice adulterate all his wares and then calls him to prayers. The thing rhymes, unexpectedly. There's rhyme and reason in it.

None such was Simeon Doris, Elder. By the smutty light that was in him the man strove to serve the Lord, and his customers, well. Often, therefore, the inward flame got more fuel than the kitchen hearth. But the stern-faced, meagre man clung to his soul's conviction through thick and thin. The Bible texts—the spiritual bread—came thickest, when the breakfast slices thinned. In the musty little, over-crowded shop two gilt texts glittered dully, on white cards, that hung crooked from the knob of an empty drawer. One, from the Old Testament, told of the scant measure that is an abomination: the other, from the Gospel, spoke of the full measure, that brings a reward. The gaunt little, quivering grocer—drab of cheek, drab of coat, drab of soul—lived deep down into the Old Covenant sentiment: his gentler wife, long buried, had striven towards the New. To the last the wife had said: "Simon, stick to the Promise!" She died of saying it. The Promise, to both of them, meant Payment in Prosperity. The grocer stuck to the Promise, shaking his head.

These were the brown facts out of which Lis Doris grew into green manhood. The sun of his childhood was Yetta, Parson's Yetta, four summers older than himself. There never had been a time when Parson's Yetta—Yetta of the Dominé, in Dutch—had been too young to interfere with, and fondle, the grocer's child. Never since the mother's stiffening arm had dropped away from the puky, underdone baby. The Dominé sat comforting the widower. Yetta, wide-eyed,

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forgotten, stood in awesome curiosity beside the bed. The forgotten baby rolled down into her arms: she held it there, so tight that it awoke and cried. A roughly and readily helpful neighbour ran in to scold her. Her explanations were marred by the fact that she was holding the baby upside down.

The baby's mother had died of many dead children, varying in age and ailments, gone before. She died as the weak poor die, letting go. Certes, she would have preferred to take the puling infant with her. From one hidden truth, however, she drew all comfort, amid her sad uncertainty. She knew God to be a great deal kinder than any one dreamed in Boldam.

In the square bit of kitchen garden, amongst beanstalks, Parson's Yetta—with the smacking neighbour within call, uncalled—"looked after Lis. "Parson's" lived a short way down the road, in the only house of the village with two windows on each side of the door.

Fortunately Lis was not difficult to look after, unless, as is so often the case with wiser nurses, you felt it your duty to worry him. His genius was for that sort of harmless mischief—the playing with non-playthings—which the best-natured grown-ups would as lief not forbid. Undeniably it is provoking to the grown-up to find, when she has brought across her new birthday doll, that a big boy of six remains persistently engrossed in a bowl of sticky green soap (filched from the neighbour), because the disgusting smears he is making all over the cloudy marble of the passage, present an endless variety of tints orange and bronze. Is the charm really in the tints or in the stickiness? Who shall say? But what rapture, when the small nurse, changing the dull mass into all the glory of bubbles, suddenly beholds a flare of delight in the eyes of her charge! That night Lis told his father he had seen to-day the most beautiful thing that ever was or could be. On Yetta's tenth birthday he saw it. She showed it him. He thanked God in his evening prayer for the bubbles. He asked God especially to bless Yetta for

putting those colours into those bubbles. After that there was much blowing of bubbles. The discovery was a starting-point to him in his dull, grey childhood. His father once asked him if he didn't get tired of bubbles? He said: No, how could he? There were never two alike! "Why, they're *all* alike!" exclaimed Simeon. The small boy felt too stunned to argue the point. He forgave his father, who was not, on the whole, unkind to him, but so frequently in error. Yetta knew an immense deal more. And Yetta could see things, if you showed them to her. She required showing, while Lis, from the first, saw things at once. Perhaps because his eyes were so big and bright, as his mother's had been. No one spoke of the dead mother. Her fading portrait hung in a corner of the room behind the shop: sometimes Simeon would stare at it and sometimes he would say aloud, that he "stuck to the Promise." Lis noticed that he did this, when there was no butter on their bread. Lis listened. hushed.

Father was Duty and Yetta was Pleasure. Between them the uninteresting neighbour inevitably fed, cleaned and smacked. Such was life.

Yetta Donderbus passed on to Lis every good thing she could get hold of. She stole sweets for him—there being no sweets at the Parsonage—from his own father's shop. She told him, as soon as he could understand (very soon) that all the marbles, all the jam-puffs, all the apples in the world were hers! It was her joy to protect him, a matron in pinafores. It was her fear that some day he might discover her to be not omnipotent and omniscient—only a girl. At eight he still found her all-sufficient: by nature he was not exacting. The years passed, and she strained to the strain. She helped him in his small lessons with her smaller knowledge. She certainly learnt better, so that he might not find out her ignorance. She spoilt him, as only the child-woman can spoil the human boy.

He had his own ideas and stuck to them. He could not endure, for instance, her conventional diversion of "making

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believe." "Now, Lis, this potato is - beautiful, red and yellow apple——" He said obstinately, four years old, that it wasn't. It was a beautiful brown potato. And he sat and stared at it. Yetta could not realise a thing beautiful and not brilliant, or a humble thing beautiful in itself.

She cried, when a passing customer stopped for a moment at the shop-door and blew smoke-balls into Lis's bubbles. She cried because Lis said they were even more beautiful than hers. It was some consolation that Lis's father, invited to repeat the experiment, failed lamentably.

But she laughed, when the same father—four years later—after increasingly indignant search, dragged his son (in Sunday clothes) off a muck-heap, whose puddles had gathered films of more darkly gorgeous variety than any clean and clear vapours in mid-air. A wonderful *cloisonné* of nephritic gases, purple, blue, pink, crimson and gold. A strangely unwholesome Byzantine mosaic of lurid and metallic gloom. Let that man laugh at such revelation, who feels himself unable to realise, with hungering soul, the cold grey life on the cold grey heath, miles away from any curious or costly object, ever fashioned by the hand of man.

"What meanest thou? Art thou mad?" cried Simeon, pointing to the dirt-stained pants. He shook his small son roughly: he struck him. Lis gazed back with startled eyes. "Father," he stuttered, "can I help it, if such beautiful things grow out of dirt?" The Elder stood suddenly "seized in the heart"—so his people say. As with all his kind, whatever imaginative faculty he possessed was semi-religious. He never forgot, till the end, the beauty that grew out of dirt.

To Lis the most memorable of these few memories is the Sunday afternoon of the storm. It is an earlier memory. Was he ever too small, he wonders, to sit through the hour-long sermon, or to remain, when it was over, for the hour-long Sunday School? The Dominé desired neither a child-audience nor an endless discourse. Law and custom called for both.

On that Sabbath of the storm Lis, sick beyond endurance of metaphysics, boldly permitted his young body to follow, in the pause between Church and School, his long-departed brain. He ran right away, seven years old, on the blazing summer heath. He ran much too far, in his alarm. Above him was the sky, aflame; beneath him the earth, red-hot. He lay on the heather, enjoying himself, panting, with terrible joy.

The treacherous black coverlet rolled down behind him, suddenly, noiselessly, quite low beneath the smiling sky. All at once, in the silent rapture and glory, a voice spoke, behind him also, with a crash that sent his heart into his throat. A peal of thunder died away into the blue. He screamed, then bit his lips. All the brilliance and the warmth were wiped out in a moment. The judgment of God dashed its weight on his small head in thick sheets of pelting rain. He bent the head, dazed, and sat down on something prickly. But presently he comprehended that the prickliness was a superfluous aggravation, and he started homewards, accepting the inevitable, soaking as he went.

As suddenly as it had come upon him, the swift punishment swept by. The heavens cleared: the sun broke forth again, upon a dripping world. The tiny, bedraggled figure, solemnified, exhausted, above all conscience-stricken, lifted its wet face. The inky pall still hung heavy over the far village, his home. And, whilst he strove to collect his scattered senses, dumbfounded and blinded by the rack that had bellowed and blazed around him, a thought awoke in his breast which checked its sobs and filled him with pride and fear. "Oh God," he said aloud, "was all that noise for me?"

As he spoke, in the distant gloom a reply wrote itself silently across the still falling rain. A segment of rainbow, the first he had ever perceived, sank out of blackness upon the roofs of Boldam. A flood against the thundercloud of radiancy and softness, a light-filled message from the heart of God!

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What it was he had no idea. He had heard enough, in vague Sabbath misunderstandings, of Jacob's ladder, of Elijah, of Enoch, the approaching era of all things, the secret rapture of Boldam saints to heaven. He had cried, on one forgotten night, lest waking in the morning, he should find his father gone. And now it was come! The crash of the world was upon him. The marvellous, luminous shaft above the village, like that in the picture of the Patriarch, was the bridge to the golden gate. Oh, the terrible, unknown splendour! He ran on, gasping, praying, crying. He would be too late. The Sunday School children were all going! He could cry no more: his heart beat like a sledge-hammer. His punishment was greater than he could bear!

Even as he ran, the glory slowly faded. He shrieked to it to stay. "Oh God," he cried, "I'll never miss my Sunday School in Heaven!" He was willing to accept an eternity of Sunday School. "Father! Father!" he gasped. The colours glided back into the blackness. Once more heaven and earth stood parted. The child, staggering forward, on the wet grass, lost consciousness of everything but his grief.

When he got up again, he said: "Yetta." And the word reminded him that the parson's daughter, whilst refusing to take "a baby" with her, had announced her intention of hunting for blackberries. In fact it was thus she had become responsible for Lis's escapade. He smiled. Yetta, then, had not gone aloft with the rest. Life would still be livable. He took courage and trudged home. The first thing to do, with a palpitating heart, was to peer over the window-sill, from the back. Father was sitting reading the Bible. A disconcerting and reassuring fact. The next thing was to find Yetta, claim promised blackberries, and confess. Lis met the Dominé at the Parsonage door. "I forgive you," said the Dominé hurriedly to the penitent. "Go to your father at once and ask for butter and hot milk."

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"Please, Dominé," asked Lis, halting, "what was that coat of many colours that fell out of heaven?"

"Fell out of——" queried the Dominé.

"And where did it fall to?" pursued Lis.

Yetta had stolen to her father's side. "He means a rainbow, the stupid," she said.

"Did you see the rainbow?" replied the Dominé.

"It is a pledge of forgiveness. Tell your father I said so, child."

Lis bed with his milk, Lis expressed his own opinion.

"If heaven is as fine as that bit of it," he said, "I should like to go there, father—in good time."

"Lis," replied the Elder, "you talk foolishness and wickedness. To such an extent, that frequently I hope you will prove to be one of the elect."

Father and Minister might forgive you, but the real Head of the School was the Minister's wife. This lady refused to receive the truant, unless he publicly confessed his fault, and said an extra text, to prove his penitence. The choice of this penal text was left to the prodigal's mood, a psychological subtlety, of which Mevrouw Dominé was inordinately proud. On the Sunday following, then, Lis stood up before the whole school and said he was sorry.

"Now your text!" commanded the Dominé's wife, with subdued curiosity. Lis stood, small, in the expectant stillness.

"When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees, then shalt thou bestir thyself," laboriously repeated Lis. There was a moment's awkward hesitation: then the corners of a teacher's mouth broke down, and the watchful children seized the opportunity for a hardly comprehended roar.

"Silence!" cried the infuriate Parsoness. "Boy, what is the meaning of this?"

The boy tried to explain that he had learnt the most beautiful text in the whole Bible. He had seen the single mulberry over the Parsonage wall in fruit at this moment,

and the Dominé, coming up behind him, amused at his intense admiration, had quoted the text. "Think what a sight—a whole valley full of them!" had said the Dominé, who weakly enjoyed conversing with intelligent children, far beyond their intelligence. The Dominé's pale eyes and Lis's bright ones had wandered away into a visionarily beautiful Palestine. "It is the dream of my life," had said the Dominé, sadly, and he gave Lis a mulberry. Lis had stained his blue tunic. Father had found the text.

"I learnt it because it sounds so beautiful," explained Lis to the Dominé's wife. "It's the most beautiful fruit in the world: the Dominé said so. It's all colours of beautiful red, like—" he yearned for something pleasant to say, something that would change her inexorable stare—"like your face," he said sweetly.

Stupid as she was, she saw he had no wish to be rude. As soon as the universal howl of delight (in which all the teachers joined) had subsided, she said with much acrimony: "You are a very stupid child. Go to your seat."

He now understood, how foolish it was to keep a secret from Yetta. And as he came out, much abashed, Parson's lubberly Ryk ran towards him.

"When you hear a noise about mulberry-trees, smite!" quoted Ryk, freely. "That's how it goes, isn't it?" And he dashed his fist into the small boy's eye. "There's for you, Mulberry-face!" The name stuck to Lis longer than the bruise. The latter he studied with interest. But when it was at its green and golden finest, he confessed to Yetta, that he much preferred her creamy pink and white.

Such are the recollections of the first twelve years, a little mixed, perhaps as in the memory of the man himself. We cannot remember all the changes of our past—Heaven be thanked!—but we can look back and see the rainbow standing out against the haze.

II

THE Ruler of Boldam was the Parsoness. She was the sort of ruler that insists on straight lines. She was also the sort of ruler that leaves a smart.

To her own children she represented merely a Possibility of Unpleasantness. Not a Probability, because she usually ignored their existence. Her time was taken up by that engrossing subject, the Parochial Soul. She thought of it as a Unit. "My World's the Parish," she would say, in unconscious travesty. She did not allow anybody to do anything that might be classed as "sin" without her knowing all about it. A Watcher on the wall of her local Zion, she strongly disapproved of the night. She managed everybody's inside, spiritually speaking, and she had so repeatedly given the Dominé (and half the congregation) a piece of her mind, that she must have had a very large one to start with. On the other hand, she never lost heart. The Dominé did, much and often, but he had a great deal of heart to start with, and special little hearts seemed to grow on to what he had, for special people, like bulbs. The Dominé had long ago accepted his wife. 'Tis the usual way. First the woman accepts the man, and then a year or two later, the husband accepts the wife. How seldom he runs away! The Dominé, having married for a face, now put the best face he could upon his marriage. And he fully appreciated that his wife's activity in the parish left him free to close his study-door. In that sinfully studious study he sat murmuring "Peace! Peace!" when there was no Peace. But he knew the ages of his children.

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Let him sit, gowned and slippered, warmed and lighted, impiously searching for beauty in the sacred Book of Job. The Parsoness must sally forth in the drizzly November evening, across to the grocer's, to the immediate benefit and annoyance of the motherless child. The child is now twelve years old and contentedly unmothered. The Parsoness, able to forgive as a Christian, but unable to forget as a woman, always alludes to him as "The Grocer's Fool." Yetta, who is sixteen and has discussions about her back-hair with her father, must steal after the Parsoness, ever fearful of hurt from her wolf to her lamb.

November evenings round the North Sea have an antique and accustomed right to drizzle. They use it. "B-r-r," said the little grocer and drew in his head. He had once heard a man speak of "ugly weather." But that man was a profane swearer and a reprobate.

Inside, the blue air thickened beneath the damp. The blurred lamp in the heavily shadowed shop smelt bad against the freckling windows. The night was chill outside, stuffy within. The boy, half-hidden behind a dusty white bale, among the gay-coloured, meanly heaped groceries, sat cheerfully humming a street tune.

"What's this?" cried the big woman, who had swept like a cloud across the lamp-light. The voice fell as thunder, the arm flashed as lightning. Only, lightning disappears.

"H'm?" said Simeon, unmoved. The singing stopped.

"Simeon Doris, grocer, I ask you what is this?"

The little Presbyterian, who never in his life had made a sharp movement or uttered a quick word, lifted his long, cadaverous countenance, like a lean horse, right over the top of the "Olive Branch."

"I always allow well over a pound, Mevrouw Dominé," he made painstaking answer, "for I know that the labourer——"

"Give less and give better," interrupted this "labourer" irately. "Will you look or will you not?" She moved aside, so that a yellow blur of lamp-light fell upon the pat of butter in her spacious palm. The small boy peered forth

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like a mouse from his hole, and popped back again. The grocer's spectacled nose dropped an inch.

"Tut, tut!" he said, with reflective indifference. "Your girl to drop her butter on the hearth!"

"My girl drop your—my——!" spluttered the irate Parsoness, accustomed only to find fault outside. "That's *your* dirty butter, Simeon Doris, just as Clasine brought it in from you, five minutes ago!"

"My butter's as clean as if I'd laid—made it myself," retorted Simeon, ruffled, and he spread his lean fingers across the missionary page. "But I've known folks as considered their hens was the only ones could lay fresh eggs." A human cackle arose from behind the meal-bag; then deathly, guilty silence filled that corner of the murk.

For only reply Mevrouw Dominé, inarticulate, thrust the hand abruptly forward, right under, and into, the unflinching grocer's grizzly beard. Charity hopes she didn't mean to. Her hand sank. The golden mass hung for half a moment, entangled, then flopped to the floor. "Look at the paper!" gasped the Parsoness of Boldam.

"The Lord knows you've a difficult temper, Mevrouw Dominé," sweetly remarked the Elder, who knew how to "aggravate" the elect. But his expression changed suddenly from provocation to pain. For the paper under his nose was smeared black on the inside. He had wrapped the Parsonage butter in *that*!

"Two pence extra and extra pure!" sneered the Dominé's wife. "Will you please to look *what* it's wrapped up in!"

"Packing paper, of course," stuttered the disconcerted grocer. Cleanliness, exactitude, neatness was the sole satisfaction, in his ill-success, of this humble little "Stick to the Promise" tradesman. His name should stand un-smutched.

"Lis's certificate!" cried the righteously wrathful Superintendent. "His Sunday School Certificate and text, signed by the Teachers on leaving! Flung into a coal-bin and picked out to wrap my butter in! Faugh!"

"I never saw it——" protested the Elder. "Lis!"

"I sent it you this morning, Doris!"

"But the ashes!" exclaimed the puzzled grocer. "I took the paper off the counter here half-an-hour ago. I thought it felt a little stiffer, in the dusk, but I was too sure of myself to light the lamp. The Lord's done it to humble my pride!"

"I did it, father: it wasn't the Lord," squeaked the child. He spoke nervously, but not without elation at the contrast.

The grocer paused by the butter-barrel with uplifted trowel.

"Of course!" said Mevrouw Dominé. "The dirty trick!"

"It wasn't a trick: it was a drawing," said Lis stoutly. "The back was so beautiful: I couldn't help it. And then I forgot."

Nobody answered, except that his father sighed. In the golden-rimmed shadow the cowed grocer regretfully weighed out a fresh pound.

"You can let me have this black stuff for the Poor-House?" suggested Mevrouw Dominé.

"Never!" emphatically answered the Elder. "I'll give them a pound of the salted, half-price, as an atonement."

Mevrouw Dominé nodded. "You ought to be more careful. Set that boy an evening task! Does he remember the Kings of Israel and Judah? I'll send him a fresh Testimonial: he isn't worthy."

"I don't want one," said Lis, at bay.

"Quite right," smiled Mevrouw Dominé, gathering up her packages. "Don't pretend to be good, when you're bad."

"Yes, I *do* want," said Lis defiantly, recalling the beautiful smooth surface. But the lady did not turn in the doorway. She talked to herself about the devil all the way across the street.

"I did it with a bit of burnt peat," declared Lis, between display and dismay.

Simeon looked up from the crumpled sheet. "A drawing, was it?" he said sternly. "You do it again at once, then, on this piece of packing-paper. And mind I can tell you what it's meant for, when it's done!"

That was the tone in the Elder's voice, which Lis very rarely heard. "I've never been hard with you, Lis," remonstrated the parent, whilst the son worked away, on a cask, under the lamp. There was truth in the appeal, truth of an Old Covenant kind. Alas for the most quoted educational precept of the Bible! The rod of Aaron is buried: the rod of Solomon blossoms hourly in pink and white. Simeon Doris would certainly never have struck his son had not Proverbs so peremptorily turned blows into chastisement.

"Must it be quite the same?" demanded Lis plaintively. "Because I think I could make another, that you——"

"Exactly and literally the same, Lis! I trust to your word. Oh, Lis, she'll tell every one after church to-morrow. 'You must be more careful,' she says. She'll tell 'em to mind the things are clean they get at Doris's!" He added bitterly: "And they *will* mind."

"I didn't dare take any more of the other paper," said Lis, with a choke in his throat. "I was just bursting to draw!"

The little grocer threw up both hands.

"My paper! Did you ever take that? That was worse! And we so poor!" Suddenly, once for all, in his early loss of childhood, the boy realised how desperately poor they were.

"It's done!" he cried. He flung his sketch down upon the counter.

Simeon Doris, with the air of an involuntary connoisseur, stood scrutinising the fresh effort between finger and thumb. A painter's figure he stood there, in the half-smoked golden haze, before the eyes of the frightened and enraptured artist: in each hand he held the old smudge and the new

one, carefully comparing them. "They're just a pair of dirty daubs," he opined. "The new one's no better than the old."

"Oh, father!" implored Lis.

"You're just a wasteful, good-for-nothing boy! What'll become of you, when I'm dead, Lis?"

"Are you feeling sick, Mynheer Doris?" inquired Yetta on the threshold.

The lad turned with a cry of relief. "Let Yetta say! Let Yetta say!"

"Paint? I can paint more clearly than that," answered Simeon threateningly. "He's been laughing at your mother, Yetta, and at me!"

Life to the poor grocer was all positive sin and uncertain retribution. His hand-to-mouth struggle foresaw a prodigal in this paper-waster, beheld already riotous living in such orgy of school-testimonials and peat.

"You tell, Yetta—you tell what it is!" insisted the boy, trembling with excitement. The girl bent over the black and grey mess, much like charcoal. "What is it? What does it mean?" urged Lis.

Yetta broke the breathless silence. "Clouds," she said quietly, facing the vexed father. Lis shouted for joy.

"I don't care. He's confessed that he's been stealing my paper——" insisted Doris.

"I stole your paper. I gave it him," said the girl.

Simeon Doris glared from one to the other. "Why didn't you tell me that, Lis? You said——"

"I don't care to tell," replied Lis.

"Ah well!" sighed the Elder, with a frown of relief and reproof. "You're too big, I suppose, Yetta, to be chastised. I could ask your poor father to pray with you, but he isn't much good as a pleader. He just thanks the Lord matters ain't worse. As if they could be! Well, well, what's the use of pleading, if our lot is arranged beforehand?" He glanced up at the clock, gave a squeak, and hurried off to his belated Saturday shave.

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Lis and Yetta remained together. "You didn't really steal the paper you gave me, Yetta?" the boy said seriously. "Of course you put the money in the till."

"Yes, of course, as I always do. For the sweets and everything," the girl answered eagerly. "I put a—a whole guilder in the till."

"A guil-der." The boy drew out the two syllables with relish. "Yetta, how can we be as frightfully poor as father says, if you put a whole guilder in the till?"

Yetta's conscience smote her. "When I grow up," she said, "I'll give you a hundred guilders."

But this was beyond him. "Why don't you let father know?" he asked.

"He'd be dreadfully angry. He'd never let me speak to you again!" she argued, alarmed.

"I don't like not telling," said Lis. He reflected a moment. Yetta was so much wiser, and better, and in every way abler than he. "But you knew it was clouds!" he sang out triumphantly. "You saw it was clouds!"

Yetta laughed, a flood of rippling sunshine, that filled with sudden fun all the dreary little shop. "You silly, how could I say it was anything else? Just a lot of smudgy smears!"

He burst into angry weeping. "It wasn't the licking I minded about. I felt sure any one could see it was clouds!"

III

A SILVER guilder is a thing unknown in the child-world of Boldam. That world counts by cents and, like the South-sea islanders, sees no reason to pass beyond five. The rest is "'Rithmetic." The silver guilder shines, at long intervals, in grown-up skies, like the full moon.

Therefore did Lis desire with increasing desire to behold it. But his father had made him solemnly promise, as an infant, never to approach within a yard of the till. Simeon Doris conceived of the human heart as a squirrel-cage, with the devil revolving inside.

"You just always do exactly as I tell you!"—that was the complete instruction of a preceptor, who believed himself to be incapable of any good thought or deed. He did not expect his advice to be followed. A cage, if you will, Simeon Doris, but you can't put a parrot inside! Young Lis is craning through the iron bars. Even before he chirps, Yetta Donderbus has brought him more fruit than he—or she—guesses from the ever-fragrant tree of life.

How he had yearned for a sheet of white paper in the long damp of many a Saturday holiday. She had divined the yearning one afternoon, as he sat, joyless, a bit of burnt peat in his hand. White paper is an especially valuable, and superfluous, object amongst the non-writing poor. The impulse, the aspiration was hot upon him to do this, just *this*, with the grey ember and the grey heaven outside. He had worked at it repeatedly: he had achieved: he had laid his master-piece ready for his father to find it.

"But I *will*," he said, clenching his teeth in the way Yetta loved. He asked her for more paper.

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To steal again from Simeon, now that he had found out and forgiven her, Yetta felt to be impossible. The grocer forgave all the more readily, from his conception of the immensity and universality of Sin. When every one is born with an hereditary right to break the whole decalogue, you can't make unpleasantness over every peccadillo. Simeon didn't expect anybody to "do as he was told." Not himself. The world was a basket of pups with some far-away Voice (in the wilderness) crying Don't! The pups would all of them be destroyed ultimately anyhow (not by drowning: that had been tried once before and had failed): they would be destroyed (all but a selection) whether they don'ted or didn't don't. The theory was as inevitably severe, as the allowances were unavoidably lax. The allowances made the theory supportable, even appreciable. Yetta Donderbus, for instance, whatever the state of her soul might be, rejoiced the dislocated heart and home of the unsmiling tailor. Her laugh was life-blood. It had always checked Lis's crying, as a baby. She never understood, why the dull little widower, one day, sitting in the dark back-room, by the fading portrait, had turned to her, when she laughed out suddenly, blithely, without any reason, and said "Thank you, child!" like the strange, taciturn, friendly little creature that he was.

"Don't look like that, Lis," says Yetta. "You shall have paints. A box full, I promise you. Give me time."

"But, Yetta, a whole silver guilder would buy all the paints in the world."

Yetta was dangling against the water-butt. Lis stood watching her. "I haven't got another silver guilder!" she said, coming down with a rush. The next moment she could have bitten out her tongue, but what's the use of that? The limit was reached. She had never really been much richer than Lis.

"Of course I understand," said Lis presently, and he drove his two fists into his novel trousers pockets. He said no more, but it came home to her that she was fallen

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from her impossible pedestal. Henceforward she must become for him "only a girl." That night, thinking it out in her own room over his three-penny photograph, she cried childishly feminine tears.

"Father, when there's a whole silver guilder in your till——" began Lis.

"There isn't often," put in the grocer, pouring out his beer.

"When it does happen, I wish you'd shew it me."

Simeon smacked his lips (beer wasn't sin to him: "There's no rules about these sins," he used to say in his perplexity) and shook his head. "The root of money's the love of all evil, Lis," he said warningly. His nervousness about the Scripture was always playing him such tricks.

Lis blushed scarlet over his white pannikin of supper. "I don't know about the root of money, father," he said. Nor did he. Nor did Simeon. Half the petty trade of Boldam was intricate exchange, the other half bad debts.

"But I'd like to see a whole silver guilder. Is it as big as a plate?" persisted Lis.

"I haven't seen one since last month. Since I paid my taxes," sighed Simeon.

Lis's leaden spoon fell with a clang. "Huh?" remonstrated his father.

"You said you hadn't——?"

"Don't drop the Lord's dinner on the floor, Lis! And don't look at me so plaintively, for you'll have to eat it all the same! Yes, yes: you know it happened once before. You must eat it all the same!" With burning cheeks and burning soul the boy obeyed, scraping the half-cold porridge from the sanded boards. Lis remembers that moment. He rose, breathing heavily, drawing his delicate frame erect.

"God resisteth the proud, Lis."

Lis did not reply.

"Lis, I'm sorry: forgive me! But, boy, you must learn somehow, what porridge costs to those as poor as we."

Lis came round and put his arm round his father's neck.

"If I had a whole silver guilder," he said thoughtfully, as if to himself.

"Well?" prompted Simeon, trying a diversion.

"I should buy paints to paint with, and a big beef-steak, and better clothes than Ryk has, and I shouldn't pick my food off the floor like a—oh, never mind, father!—and I should buy a house to live in as fine as the Dominé's, and a horse to ride that kicks up its fore-legs, and fine cigars for you such as Yetta says the Dominé got from the Town Gentleman, and—and—and——"

"Lis, Lis, stop! You couldn't get all that for ten thousand guilders!"

"I don't care. Once I got started, I'd do it," replied Lis doggedly. "Anyway I could buy the cigars." He stood away from his father, red-hot, with uplifted ladle. The small grocer sat staring, his long arms pendant by his chair.

"Who's that in the shop?" called the small grocer, "Yetta? Come here, Yetta! I need your help."

"I was coming to see about Lis's cold," said Yetta.

"It's rather his heat wants seeing to. He's forging a Golden Serpent—I mean a Brass Calf—for his own evil inside. Oh, Lis, avoid the tenth commandment. What cigars did the Town Gentleman give the Dominé?"

"The finest he ever smoked. The Town Gentleman's very rich," answered Yetta. Then she laughed at the excited child.

"Laugh away: some day I'll get all I said," declared Lis angrily. "Paints in plenty, and red roses in a garden, and a white horse that runs fast."

"How will you get all that?" demanded Yetta, much interested.

"Don't be so stupid, Yetta! How can I know how?"

"And when you've got a fine house, Lis, will you live in it all alone?"

"No. I'll buy a beautiful lady to live in it with me."

"Me, Lis? Me? Will I do?"

He looked at her. "Ye-es," he said, considering and considerate. "Ye-es, you'll do."

But the Elder broke in upon her merriment and reminded Lis, that he must one day give an account of every word that he spoke. The boy had often received this admonition with great discomfort, but to-night he seemed in a reckless mood.

"When I'm dead?" he questioned.

"When you're dead," answered Simeon severely.

"Or before," put in Yetta. But the words, at the present moment, passed over the heads of both father and son. A tinkle at the shop-bell called the father: he carried off the lamp. Lis drew closer to Yetta.

"Just think, father never found your guilder in the till."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Yetta.

"Hush! Yetta, I don't understand. It all seems as if nothing never happened."

The room was dismal: the hour was dismal: a dismal wind howled round the lonely little house: it struck a great yell down the chimney, frightening them both, in the dark.

"Nothing never did," said Yetta softly. She hid her face in her hands. A faint light shone against the curtained glass-door. Lis pressed closer still.

"It's no use, Lis," she whispered in his ear. "You're growing too wise. I give it up. I haven't any money. I'm as poor as you are. I'd nothing to put in the till, let alone a silver guilder. I never had. But you mustn't mind, Lis. Oh, you mustn't mind! You must love me just as much, though I'm poor, Lis! I'll do all for you that I can."

"You—took the things?" stammered Lis.

"Nothing that was really anything. A sweet or two—an apple—a bit of white paper——"

"Oh, Yetta, you're a thief!"

She flung away her fingers from her face: she tossed

back her yellow hair, in the half-light. "Yes," she cried, "Yes, Yes, Yes. For you. For you. For you."

"Oh," he murmured. "A thief!"

For a moment she brazened it out. Then she snatched him to her bosom. "You mustn't mind me, Lis," she cried, weeping. "You see I am only a woman, a grown woman, and you are a little man!"

"I'm only so sorry," he said, beginning to cry miserably too.

"But I'll get you the paints. Oh, have patience for a day or two. I'm getting you the paints."

"I don't want them. I won't have them," he protested in sudden alarm.

"Yes, you will," she wept, clinging to him. "I'll get you them honestly. I will."

So they clung to each other, weeping softly, lest Simeon should hear, and the wind maundered dismally round the house.

IV

THE Feast of Santa Claus is the supreme event of the children's year in Holland. It has nothing to do with Christmas-tide and, indeed, what should the Coming of the Christ-child have in common with the Festival of Santa Claus?

The latter has always been the Children's Patron, since the world started saints and patrons. The fifth of December is St. Nicholas' Eve. On that night the good Bishop from Africa rides with his negro servant over all Dutch house-tops and drops gifts through the countless chimneys into the children's expectant shoes. One weakness he shares with many patrons: his blessings fall thickest where the needs seem least. There is something snobbish, be it said not irreverently, in the lesser divinities. They are more like the courtiers than like the King.

But the poorest of Dutch peasant or fisher ragamuffins obtain some half-penny trifle from the black servant's bag. A tin trumpet, a tiny ginger-doll, a something: a great delight that fills a little heart and doesn't overload it. In the big houses everything is apt to be overloaded now-a-days, the hearts, and the rest.

Even in Boldam, then, December early brought signs of the approaching festivities. 'Tis the rainy season of cakes and sweetmeats. A few drops—fruit drops—fell here and there in the bleak desert. Most of the children still firmly believed in the good Bishop. Lis also believed, no longer firmly,

"Why didn't you name me Nicholas, father?" he asked. "instead of Cornelis? Then Santa Claus'd have been my godfather—and I born on his day."

■

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"Don't talk nonsense, Lis," replied the Elder, unable to accept the saint, unwilling to ignore him.

Lis had picked together the fragments, after the first shivering shock of Yetta's frailty. Perhaps he was all the better for feeling that a man must depend on himself. The sorrow was more hers than his. The loss was his. But a man isn't broken-hearted, because a girl stops giving him things.

Any one who knows anything about him by this time will therefore realise something of his feelings when, next to his father's twopenny-halfpenny trifles he found a magnificent box of paints in his poor Santa Claus shoe. His last illusion about Santa Claus faded definitely into dreamland: his young belief in Yetta revived. He was far too loyal a friend to think that because she had confessed to purloining a sweet or two she would now intrigue to steal money. She had promised to get these things honestly. There they were.

The box was a valuable one, far too good for his requirements. An artist's box that must have cost a gold piece. Of this he was unaware, but he contemplated, in wide-eyed awe, the polished mahogany, the brass hinges, the china and glass. When he turned, with a gasp, his father stood, equally contemplative, behind him.

"The girl's quite mad," said Doris. But nobody scolds on this day of days. "That's a pretty plaything, Lis," added the grocer. "Only—only you're getting too old to play."

"I might—work with it," said Lis, feeling after an incomprehensible truth.

Elder Simeon Doris laughed—that is to say, he solemnly ha-ha'd. "You couldn't paint much of a house-front with that!" he said, jerking a long contemptuous finger. "It's time you got to work, Lis. Our days are as a hand-breadth."

Lis looked down at his small hand.

"David had a bigger hand than yours, Lis," said Simeon

hastily. "All the same, now you've left school,—and to-day's your thirteenth birthday—it's time you took to a trade."

"Yes," admitted Lis, gazing at his wondrous box.

"Is there anything you'd choose very particular?" Acute anxiety spoke in the grocer's tones.

"I should like to be a house painter," suddenly declared Lis.

"Why a painter?" asked his startled parent.

"I should like to paint grey houses against a long grey sky."

"People don't want their houses painted grey, Lis."

"I'd do it all the same," said Lis.

"There's beautiful colours in groceries, Lis," insinuated Simeon.

Lis, in his long brown night-gown, looked down at his naked toes.

"I want you to begin going round with the hand-cart after Christmas, Lis."

There was a long pause, then. "It'll be fun going round with the hand-cart," said Lis at last. "Do you find it fun, father?"

"No," confessed Simeon. "Not with my rheumatiz."

"I shall like going round with the cart for you," admitted Lis. "Boys don't have rheumatiz."

Simeon drew his son to his shoulder: he would have kissed the boy, had he dared. "Life isn't fun," said Simeon.

"Life's wickedness. Deary me, how the best of saints try to come over you, when you're going round with the cart!"

"Was Santa Claus a good saint, father?" questioned Lis.

"Santa Claus wasn't a Saint at all, he was a Papist abomination," replied the Elder with fervour. "Saints is Protestant."

"Yetta isn't a saint, but I love her." Lis began a not unpractised hunt in the dark bed-cupboard for his stockings. "What makes a saint a saint?" he queried.

"Just being born one: it's nothing to do with goodness or trying." The grey grocer sighed. "Jacob's born a saint and Esau isn't. Esau couldn't be Jacob, if he tried."

"Well, Jacob prigged things," reflected Lis, as he hurried to the Parsonage, his treasure under his arm. For Lis, besides a little reading, writing, and arithmetic, had learnt all about the doings of the ancient Jews. His was not in any way an historic intellect. He didn't care for what had vanished. The present engrossed him, the thing he saw before him, the interest of the eye. The back-room at home, bare, poverty-struck, wearily familiar yet irresistibly unsame, in its constant variations of light and shadow against the grizzled walls. The solitary little street of the little village, broad, brief, in its dingy unloveliness, dying away, a few vague stains and smudges, against the vast greyness of moorland and sky. All the long gloom of existence in the beautiful, sorrow-set world.

The beautiful world: every one can see how beautiful it is, in its endless greys and greens! And father, who is the wisest of all men (though not so well-informed as Yetta) daily speaks of its sorrow and its shame.

And the sudden sunshine, bright in the brief summer, brighter still in the briefer winter-frost! And the glory and delight of Santa Claus morning: a whole box of red and blue colours breaking through the wet December mist!

He ran to the back-entrance of the Parsonage, beloved of all those who dreaded the front. The front was a false front: the Parsoness pounced round the corner. There was no risk, as a rule, of meeting her near the kitchen. She was of opinion that nobody should mind what they ate—or wore. She didn't. She only took an interest in kitchen developments when they afforded cause of complaint against some prominent parishioner. Santa Claus upsets everything. The wicked superstition! She would have ignored it, with her own children, but the Dominé bought things. Such things! What nobody else would touch. The Parsoness suspected the Town Gentleman of having sent a ginger-

bread "Sweet-heart" to Clasine. The suspicion, according to her habit, was unfounded. Elder Doris had given the girl the cake, as amends for the fuss about the butter.

Clasine, the young maid-of-all-work, was the centre, pivot and spring of all life at the Parsonage. She explains it. Every child in the house, from the minister downwards, expected everything he needed, or wanted—and got it in nine cases out of ten—from Clasine. She was an apple-faced, bustling Dutch peasant girl. She had four pounds a year wages, and sang at her work.

She was twenty: her voice rose under provocation—"her only fault," said the Dominé, harassed in his study. At this moment she had full occasion, for Ryk Donderbus, the great lubber, had penetrated into the kitchen and eaten the "Sweet-heart's" head—Lis said it was a low thing to do! The young Donderbus replied distinctly, and Lis, not liking the nature of his reply, flew at this huge antagonist, and was getting a thrashing for his pains.

Mevrouw Donderbus, bursting into the kitchen, knocked up against Lis wiping his forehead. Her own son, whisking round the door-post said: "Mulberry-face!" The ancient allusion was not a happy one: Mevrouw Dominé turned to the Grocer's Fool. That young man had lost his breath in the battle. He had the agility, however, to divert Mevrouw's attention from the mutilated "Sweet-heart." The move cost him his own secret.

"What's that?" exclaimed the Parsoness—her classic beginning of a row.

"My present," replied Lis, clinging fast.

"Who gave it you?" demanded the tyrant.

"Santa Claus," retorted the Grocer's Fool, who was certainly not such a simpleton as to fancy he owed the whole truth to a Mevrouw Donderbus.

Unfortunately the Parsoness was one of the very few malcontents in Holland who hold that all "make-believe" is sinful even in connection with Santa Claus. She was of course unable to distinguish between deceit and convention,

and she always imagined everybody to be as limited as herself, and exactly in the same way. She therefore seized upon Lis (who proved recalcitrant) and hurtled him straight into the study.

The study was the pleasantest room—the only pleasant room—in that Parsonage. Mevrouw Donderbus, when exceptionally at home, sat in a cupboard filled with files and piles; she rarely entered the study. The room was low and long, like a corridor, dark with books and a sunless garden. Furniture it contained little beyond the books and a vast desk. Its prominent feature, however, was a huge green sofa, like a bedstead, on which a tall man could lie full-length, surrounded by folios. This unique article the children had delightedly nicknamed "Abraham's Bosom." Almost more characteristic of conditions at the Parsonage seems the fact that a dip in the threshold of father's room was alluded to as "The Great Gulf" by everybody in the house but the Parsoness, happily unconscious of any nicknames at all. The Dominé denied that the discovery was his. The Parsonage children are scattered over the world now, in the Argentine, in the Indies—not one but his heart softens at thought of "Abraham's Bosom," with father's musical voice issuing from somewhere under the whole heap of them, telling fairy stories, ancient and eastern, "rubbish," remarks Mother, "from end to end."

Yetta was at her morning task of dusting her father's books. Her father sat writing at his desk. When did her father not sit writing at his desk? When he lay in "Abraham's Bosom," covered in by books and babes. Personally as spruce as careful "physicure" and Clasine's darning could keep him, the Dominé considered dust no disparagement to a book-room, but he liked watching Yetta at work. He liked the sight of his increasingly good-looking children and his still good-looking wife. He had espoused the latter solely for her looks. He considered she had made a bad bargain. He admitted that all her strictures were legitimate. It was true that he neglected his small parish and

ought to have had a larger. It was true that he sat too much in his study, for he sat there all day. His bright bride could never have foreseen, that a suddenly revived infantile stutter would banish the brilliant young preacher to Boldam, and keep him there. The parishioners called their speckless preacher "Dusty," because the miller, years ago, had owned a pony of that name, which—bucked.

"This," cried the Parsoness, hauling Lis over the "Great Gulf," "is a Christian boy who believes in Santa Claus!" Yetta dropped—and caught—a book.

"A Mohammedan would be more unusual," replied the minister, calmly turning at his desk.

"What?" The Parsoness held on to Lis, who held on to his box.

"Exactly, my dearest." The tall figure in the grey dressing-gown rose, with a weary abandonment of the pen.

"What have you got, b-boy, in that very nice b-box?"

"Yes, Lis," said Yetta quickly and cunningly. "What have you got in that box?"

"It's what he's got in his heart that matters," struck in the Parsoness, who, caring nothing for the child's presents or pleasures, clung tight (even tighter than to his body) to his soul. "A horrible Popish superstition! The Reformation delivered us from Popish Claus!"

"Did you intend a pun, my dear?" inquired the Dominé appreciatively. "It is really quite a good one." The Dominé's chief joy in life was discovering non-existent talents in his family.

The Parsoness retired under cover. "I'm ashamed of you, Dominé," she replied.

"Quite right, Theodora. I feel somebody ought to be. I'd as lief it was you as myself."

As Mevrouw Donderbus could make nothing of this "foolishness," she diverged to the small "Grocer's Fool" at her side. "Say what you came here for, and begone," she snapped. The first half of the command was sufficiently startling: it needed not the tone.

"I—I," stammered the uncomfortable child, insulted and injured, preening its feathers. It was anxious to hold its own and yet not to be rude. "I don't know. I wanted to ask Yetta——"

Miss Donderbus dropped—and missed—a book. It banged—like a "Don't!"—to Master Doris.

"Pascovius is a valuable work, Yetta," remonstrated the Dominé, mildly. "It was a pity to drop him." The Dominé smiled. "The Church has fortunately dropped him a long time ago. His sermons are all dam—dam—dam——"

"Donderbus!" exclaimed the Parsoness.

"Nation. Yes, my dear?"

"Ask her, if she'd care to see the beautiful present," continued Lis very deliberately, "that was given me by somebody else."

"Well, she wouldn't," replied the Parsoness, despairing of her husband, as usual. "She had nothing to do with your presents. You come away with me, Lis Doris, and I'll give you the story of a little Popish lad, who said he didn't believe in Saint Somebody, and was burnt by the priests in Ecuador only last year. You can't make any of your messes on that for it hasn't got a white page." Lis was glad of any reprieve. Father'd like to read about the martyr, not he.

"I wonder," said the Dominé, alone with his daughter and again intent on his papers. "Could the child perceive the twist in that argument? I hope not."

"The child will perceive what there is to perceive, according to his habit," remarked Yetta, dusting for very life. "And he won't say what needs no saying, for that is his habit too."

"Yetta," the Dominé wrote carefully, in his clear little copper-plate, "you are more and more wrapped up in that b-boy."

"He is going to be somebody great, father."

"He is at the age when we all fancy that, child. Even young clodhoppers on the Overysseel heath."

Yetta laughed, the laugh that made the sunshine. "Why, father, he doesn't know anything about it! That's the joke. It's such fun watching him"—she moved some books—"and speculating on what it'll all look like, twenty years hence!"

"Don't speculate too much, Yetta. The outsiders always p-pay."

Yetta looked quickly round. Her father's nose was buried in a folio. It was a big nose, but a bigger folio. Yetta dusted industriously. The pen scratched across the paper. The Dominé was taking notes.

The Parsoness's name, by the bye, was not Theodora. The Dominé had given her that name in their honeymoon. He made a point of retaining it, as the years went by.

"THIS passage in the Book of Job," wrote the Dominé, happy, as ever, in silence and exegesis, "sufficiently proves the extreme antiquity of the superstition that divinities pass through the air, bringing gifts."

"Father, it's a small world, this Boldam." Yetta had moved to the other wall, dusting Pascovius's antagonists, reposefully dead, as he.

The Dominé came out of the silence. His slow gaze wandered along the dark lines of volumes, with the portraits hanging against the book-shelves—Kuenen, Ewald, Renan—the modern school of Old Testament critics, *his* world, unknown, abhorred by name, in Boldam.

"Child, I don't want to philosophise," said the Dominé, "but note that, the smaller our world is, the sooner we bruise our souls against the barriers."

"Father," replied Yetta, "when we climbed over the wall to get at the Deacon's apples, I hurt my knees till they bled."

"You should not treat me to these reminiscences, Yetta. Your mother would not approve."

"Do you?"

"Certainly not, as the owner was a Deacon. Don't tell me which: I should have to refund. The apples, being unpicked, were unripe. They probably hurt you more than the wall."

Yetta turned from the shelves. "The apples were unripe," she said, "and half-rotten, and wretched. I scratched my knees and my hands to get them! But they were sweet—oh, they were sweet!"

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"Because?" The Dominé had soft grey eyes: a strange little light used to come up behind them.

"Because they were on the other side of the wall!" gasped Yetta. She pressed her hands tight, with the duster between them.

"Well, that is at least a better reason than the Hebrew philosopher's," said the Dominé. "My dear child, when you presently leave home, you will find the apples on the other side. Some will be half-rotten and wretched. I pray God not all!"

"And what'll be *my* apples?" cried Yetta, clinging to her metaphor. "When I've worked long enough, and hard enough, and passed all my examinations—then, then, at last—oh joy!—I cango as a school-mistress, a school-madam! 'Please, teacher.' 'No, teacher.' 'I don't know, teacher.'—an old sour, spectacled school-madam, with a framed testimonial for forty years' hard work!"

The Dominé looked quickly away from her, away along the yellow bust of Plato which kept watch over the "Gulf."

"Teaching children right," he said, "is a happier life-task than teaching g-grown people wrong."

She paused, troubled by his tone. "Father, you're too modest," she began timidly. "Everybody says your sermons are beautiful."

"Who is everybody? Hardly the people here."

"People who understand you—from the Town."

"Ah, the Town Gentleman? I shouldn't mind about the stut-utter, if I was certain of my facts."

"I assure you people say so."

The Dominé smiled. "*That* fact I will accept, from you. I meant that I shouldn't care—not much, *now*—how badly I said things, if only I was sure of what I said. Revealed religion, after all, is a series of facts." He smiled again, vexed to think he was uttering thoughts he had always, unendurably, kept to himself. "So the Town Gentleman likes my sermons!" he repeated, not displeased. "Yetta, how did you get that expensive box for that boy?"

"Why? What do you know?"—the dark room seemed to twist round, as she caught, in vain, at her breath.

"Nothing but that the box is your present. I saw that in your face, and his. Fathers see things."

"Does mother?"

"Your mother sees a great deal farther than I—perhaps not always quite so clearly. My mind—" he sighed—"is a microscope. You don't object to telling me, child, where you got so costly a toy?"

"Yes, I do object," said Yetta.

He sat down in a corner of the sofa, leaving the big silent invitation beside him.

"I object, because you won't approve," said Yetta.

"You might try me: I have great powers of approval."

The girl stood silent, plucking at her auster.

"If I, a proud, self-indulgent father, don't approve, be sure that you have done approving long ago."

She threw up her head. "Oh, no," she said. "Only the people about here are so stupid and narrow. They're glad to think everything's wrong."

In my own case I admit the stupidity: the narrowness I deny. And my inclination to think almost everything's right has been my b-b-bane."

"I don't care!" she cried, and tossed back her yellow locks. "Oh, I know 'Don't Care' came to a bad end, but what sort of end did 'Worry' come to? I'm going straight ahead, father, over the wall, or up against it, as the case may be! Oh, it's not for myself. I'm all right, I suppose. I shall just live my little tread-mill round as a good woman. But the boy! Ah, that boy! Yes, he is my one interest in this hole of a place! What a dull world it would have been all these years but for the amusement and pleasure of the boy! He shall have his life, all I can get for him, all he deserves—more! Oh, such a different life, some day, from *this*."

"My dear Yetta," said the Dominé, patting the sofa.

"I like to see a railway-engine rushing ahead. Especially on the rails. And I like to think the driver has a b-brake."

"But——"

"There are automatic brakes, I believe," continued the Dominé, consulting the ceiling. "I have no conception how they work, but they must be a great comfort to their possessors. You and I were born without."

"Father, you don't trust me?" she answered suddenly.

His eyes came down from the ceiling, straight at hers.

"Can I trust you to trust yourself?"

She recoiled. "But the boy shall have his life!" she panted. "By fair means or foul! He shall go out into the open world, the world of colour, and blossom and sunlight! He shall have his house, and his horse, and the rest!"

The Dominé went over to his desk: he came back with an unopened envelope. His hand trembled slightly.

"Two days ago," he said, "the p-post brought this. I know what it is. It is an anonymous letter: I had one like it once before: I recognise the handwriting. The last one was about—some one else, nasty but—true. I haven't opened this one. Cowardly, eh?" She gazed at him open-eyed. Naturally she did not know that the Dominé, a few months ago, had fought a terrible fight, single-handed, over a graceless escapade of her brother Ryk.

"The day before this came," continued the Dominé, "I received a postcard, exactly as in the former case, saying: 'To-morrow I shall write you about your *daughter*.' Only that. Evidently my kind correspondent has heard of a law against libel." The Dominé stopped. Father and daughter looked at each other still.

"We will not read this, Yetta—will we?" said the Dominé, and he went over to his stove and slowly flung the letter into the fire.

She broke impetuously through his silence. She held out her hand, turned down, in the light of the flames.

"By my own hand I earned the box," she cried between

tears and laughter. "And I didn't even work with it. Father, did you know I had such a beautiful hand?"

Suddenly, in the firelight, the Dominé's face went grey. "I love your heart and your hand beyond anything you dream, and you play with me!" he cried.

But at that she threw herself upon his breast, and drew him down to the old sofa. "The Town Gentleman has been drawing it," she said. "Over and over again. He says it is the most beautiful hand in the world."

"The artist! Yetta, how had he the opportunity? You never told us!"

"What was the use of telling a person like Mother?" She lay alongside him, in the fresh young glow of her girlhood: the cruel words struck cold to the depths of his cheerless heart.

She saw it, and tightened her clasp round his neck: the right sleeve fell back to the shoulder. "He says that the arm is as beautiful as the hand," she murmured. "He teased me about Lis, but he paid me with the box. I made him. It came yesterday."

"What more did he paint?" The question came laboriously from those quiet cleric lips in the Calvinist village of Boldam.

He felt her cheek blaze out against his own. "You—you shouldn't have burnt the letter," she cried, and then, again eagerly penitent, she hugged him to her heart. "Oh, you noble, splendid father, how I love you for doing it! I shall always, always remember, when I want to do something wrong. Yes, I shall want to do something wrong! Yes, I shall! But I haven't yet. I won't go again, if you don't like it, but I may go just *once* more—just once—mayn't I?—to bring Lis?"

"I would rather——"

"Father, only just *once*, to bring Lis. I must. I've promised. And to show we don't care about letters!"—Again her cheek burned—"He's quite a nice man, father—a good man!—see—how he comes to church!"

"And admires my sermons," the Dominé smiled gravely. "I thought he came for his p-picture effects. I know nothing of this gentleman, Yetta, except that he smokes excellent cigars. Those he sent me were for the pleasure, he wrote, that he had received at my hands. I am glad I smoked them all, Yetta, before you spoilt their taste."

"He shan't paint mine again, as you don't like it," she said. "Never again."

"Like a paper on the fire," replied the Dominé. "White—white till it touches it, and at once it turns brown. And black ever after, unperishable, against the chattering flames."

"What are you thinking of, father?" she asked in a whisper.

"A woman's reputation."

After that they nestled still closer, in Abraham's Bosom, with their eyes on the red glow and the burnt rag, unread, in the stove.

The Parsoness burst in upon them, over the Great Gulf, with a bang of the door, of her hand, of her voice.

"The little pig!" she shouted. "The little goat! The calf!" For with such inaccuracy did the Parsoness love to allude to the black sheep of her fold. "He ran away home!" She snorted.

Yetta adjusted her sleeve: the Dominé's countenance evinced satisfaction.

"You are glad he got away, Johannes!"

"It is always a pleasure to me, Theodora, to think of people at rest in quiet homes of peace."

"At rest—h'm!" trumpeted the Parsoness. "He'll be feeling pretty sorry he got away without his box."

Yetta sat up. "Without his box?"

"Yes, what business is it of yours, Miss? Have you got to look after the boys' souls in this parish? Not while I am the Parson's wife. It fell to the floor."

"It fell to the floor? Father!"

"Hush, child! Your mother will explain."

"He wouldn't answer, and he wouldn't let me look inside it. I boxed his ears soundly, and it fell to the——"

"You struck him!" shrieked Yetta. She had leapt to her feet: she beat down her mother's loud accents. "You struck him—the motherless child! Father—look—look—she says she struck him! She struck him, father! The motherless little fellow! Why don't you"—she turned on her mother—"strike me?"

"Why don't I indeed?" hissed the big Parsoness.

"Why don't you? Shall I tell you? Because I'm not worth while. I'm only your daughter. I can look after myself. Oh, I know it's wicked, father. I won't say it again. Don't look like that, father. I'd never—never—but she struck him! You struck him! I didn't mean to say it. Oh, mother, forgive me!" She buried her face in her hands, at last, and burst into tempestuous tears.

"You had better go straight up to your room and pray, Yetta," said the Parsoness severely. "I need not tell you what you should pray *for*."

"For yourself and for us, Yetta," said the Dominé. He drew his motherless daughter towards him, and kissed her on the forehead, as she slowly passed over "the Gulf."

The maid Clasine stood outside, arms a-kimbo.

"There's that hussy from the sheep-cote," she announced.

"Her mother's brought her, because she says Mevrrouw promised to pay out of the Fund for——"

"Yes, yes, your mistress is coming," hastily interrupted the Dominé. He closed the thick door upon his women-folk. The study was brown and peaceful. The Dominé sat down by his papers, before the waiting Book of Job.

VI

YETTA dashed through the living-room, snatching up the box in her path, and tore away, hatless, into the open, away from reflection and prayer, in search of Lis.

She found the shivering bundle hidden in the blackest corner of his father's shed. Together they surveyed the ruin in the dark : there was light enough to grieve by.

"You need not try to make me cry," said Lis : his voice shook. "I'm too old."


"Happy Lis ! The older I become, the more I intend to cry."

"You're a woman. Women like crying." Lis adjusted two broken bits of glass. His offended protectress rose, out of the coals, with dignity.

"There's only one thing to be done, and we will do it," she said. "Come along." Together they went out into the fog, and together began their trudge across the moor. The moor is always wide and often grey and mostly lonely : to-day both felt it to be very much all three. They walked in silence, for their thoughts were full of the insult, to which neither felt at liberty to refer. But by the time they reached the corner, where the bleak road turns aside to the restful trees of Aldervank, the great love in Yetta's bosom had conquered her great pride. She stopped abruptly and drew the boy backward by his shoulders, her hands under his chin. "You mustn't mind. It's worse for me," she said.

"I don't mind," he gulped.

"Yes, you do. You ought to. But you must love me enough to forgive."



"She's only a woman," said Lis: the angry tears were in his eyes now: Yetta guessed at them.

"I'll love you so much," she continued. "So enormously, you'll have to forgive."

"She doesn't know you gave it," he said, following up his own thoughts.

"She may now," answered Yetta. "I've done with secrets. I've told her so much this morning—what I thought I'd *never* tell her—it doesn't matter what I tell her now."

He pondered over these mysterious words, dully, as they passed along under the black tracery of the trees. The distance from Boldam to Aldervank is barely two miles. Sometimes one carried the heavy box and sometimes the other. They were glad to find themselves beneath the sheltering beeches and birches.

Suddenly Lis remembered about Isaac going with Abraham.

"I say, where are you taking me?" he inquired.

"Don't you know? Haven't you guessed?"

"No: how could I?"

"Oh, Lis, and you came all this way without bothering? Oh, Lis, you believe in me as much as that?" She glowed with pleasure.

"I want to find out about the box," said Lis. "I'm awfully curious. You see, you didn't steal it."

"Thank you, Lis."

"Because you promised not to. I want awfully to know how you got it. It's great fun—is Santa Claus."

"You shall know in a minute," she answered. "Lis, I don't believe there ever was a man despised womankind more than you do."

"No, I don't. Whatever do you mean?" He opened his child-eyes wide.

"That's what I love you most for, I suppose. You're right: we are fools, Lis. Will you give me a kiss to pass this gate?"

"All right," he said—very politely. She stood aside

and led the way to the farm-house, that hides behind four square linden-trees. The farm-house is the Holst. Just now it looked bare, and the trees looked naked. Farm-people doubtless understand why the whole twelvemonth of nature is needed for a farm. The ordinary ignoramus fancies the agricultural year might have been reduced with advantage by one half. From being too long-drawn the thing has got mixed up. The seasons come in wrong places, anyhow, overturning all arrangements, and proving that, with a little more compactness, there would have been less scope for such tricks. 'Tis a sad sight, a farm-house in December, with nothing that could interest the city-man (as whose plaything it was created) going on.

This lucky farm-house, however, possessed a winter Summer-fly. "Summer-flies" is the name, which the country-people give to those Town-bred citizens who spread over the fields in the hot season and worry the peasants and the cows. With the first chill of autumn they disappear. The Holst, however, had uniquely kept its Summer-fly. The whole village, wildly envious, acquiesced. There was no reasonable reason for a Summer-fly's coming: there was really no reason why the creature should go. This one had chosen to remain: to the Boonbakkers' exceeding profit. He painted; and that of course explains every craziness. It appears he could never leave off painting old Boonbakker, probably because old Boonbakker was the ugliest, twistiest, wrinkleddest old curmudgeon in the whole curmudgeonly neighbourhood. The other farm-wives suddenly envied foolish-faced Vrouw Boonbakker her parchmety, beak-nosed spouse.

But the real bubbles of excitement rose up all over the morass of public opinion at Boldam and Aldervank, when it became known that Parson's Yetta spent many a quiet hour in the painter's room. The news was all over the place suddenly, in fatal whispers. The Dominé and his wife remained unconscious: Ryk, their good-for-nothing son, possessed the sole virtue of silence about other people's

vices : Elder Doris was the last man to hear scandal, for there's no fun in telling of human frailty to one who is never surprised by it. But plenty of tongues wagged in pairs, behind palms. Careless Yetta never got over it.

"I tell her not to," said foolish, fat, pink and white Vrouw Boonbakker. "Often and often I've warned her. But dear, dear, it's very sweet, and we all come to it, if we can ! And I've told her that too." She looked out of window, her fat arms in the wash-tub. "There's the silly moth fluttering up again ! But this time she's got a boy with her. There's no fun in it, if you bring along a boy. I should think my 'brother' Piet still feels the box on the ear I gave him—ha ! ha ! Boonbakker !" She broke off suddenly, splashing : "Ha !"

"Yes, I know about your lovers," said the grumpy old man by the fire-side. "I mean, I know what you want me to know."

"Ha ! Ha ! Not half as much as I could tell."

"But twice as much as you can get me to believe." He pulled out his sempiternal pipe. Seen without it (in church) his face looked undressed.

"She's a smart girl : she'll get into a lot of mischief," said Vrouw Boonbakker with a pleased sigh. "Well, it's no matter to us, as long as she keeps the Summer-fly here !"

"He stops here to paint *me* !" boomed the old man indignantly. But the Vrouw had walked off, laughing and wiping her hands. "Come in, my pretty," she said, and tried to chuck the recoiling girl under the chin. "Is that one of your brothers ? When *my* 'brother' Piet——" she simpered.

"Is Mynheer Pareys in ?" demanded Yetta.

"Be sure he is ! When my 'brother' Piet ran after me, I boxed his ears." She laughed aloud, a shrill cackle. "But you're a wiser girl, and a better, than I was. I never was wise, or good, but I had a good time !"

"I intend to be as wise as I can but not as good," replied Yetta, summing up many a scrap of idle talk with this frail

counsellor. "Come along, Lis!" She opened a door off the passage, turned to the boy, said in a thrilling whisper: "Santa Claus!" and walked in without more ado.

"You, of course," said the Town Gentleman—querulously. "It couldn't be any one else."

"Why do you stop here if you want visitors?" objected Yetta.

"Because I get the visitors I want," replied the Town Gentleman, bowing chivalrously from his couch. "And because to be at variance with oneself is an exquisite delight to some un-simple natures. You don't understand that?"

"No," answered Yetta. "When I want to do a thing, I start doing it. So I've brought the boy here."

The Town Gentleman pretended suddenly to discover the little peasant with the big box. "This, then," he said, "is the real, live Lis Doris. My dear boy, I know you inside and out. Your attitude in church is exemplary. Your character, as read by this lady, attractive. Will you allow an ordinary mortal the honour of your hand?"

Lis, who didn't enjoy being laughed at, said he thanked for the beautiful box. As his habit was, he had seen the whole room on entering it. He now fixed his eyes full on the Town Gentleman.

"My name, Mr. Lis Doris, is Odo Pareys. You will know me again. What do you think of me?"

"I think you are handsome," said Lis.

The Town Gentleman smiled. "How sweet those words would have sounded from the lips of your companion! Close your eyes and describe me. Hair—nose—fire away."

Lis obeyed. "You've got black curly hair. And a white face, and black eyes. You're tall and thin, and you've got a lot of rings on your fingers. They're thin." He stopped.

"Clothes," commanded the Town Gentleman curtly.

"You've got on a queer red coat and gold slippers. And a beautiful shiny stone in your tie."

"First-rate, especially the stone. You seem to have a weakness for jewels. Open your eyes. Jove, you've a pair of shiny stones of your own. Yetta, I daresay you're right: the boy looks less a fool than one expects. Now, could you describe the room in the same manner?"

"No," said Lis. "I don't know the names of the things. I never was in a room like this in my life. It's finer than the Dominé's!"

"Pooh! *our* house!" sneered Yetta.

"You two most diverting barbarians," said the Sybarite on the sofa, "I know hundreds of places a thousand times more beautiful."

"I don't," answered Yetta quickly. "I should like to come here every day."

"Do!" said the Town Gentleman. Yetta suddenly remembered that she was there for the last time. But Pareys was watching the peasant boy, and realising, with artistic relish, what it means to have travelled twelve long years through this full world and never to have seen a better dwelling than a hut.

But Lis Doris might have fared farther than Boldam and never seen such a stage setting as the artist had made himself in this old timbered farm-house. One side was an immense studio-window, high up against the ceiling: all the rest was Chinese embroidery and Japanese lacquer: a rainbow mass of variegated glitter against old rose-colour and dead gold. Enormous dragon-bowls stood everywhere, full of soup-plate chrysanthemums. Fretted lanterns hung low from the silks of the ceiling: little cabinets lurked in draped corners, bright with porcelain and bronze. Charming as many of the objects were, the whole room left an impression as if a gigantic kaleidoscope had fallen to pieces through the roof. The owner of these accumulated wonders lay on an open-work gilt Burmese settee, undoubtedly effective in his red silk against the tarnished mandarin cushions. A couple of Chinese chows nestled in safe corners and snarled, if their master moved.

"So you like my room?" said the master, amused.
"How about your own? Is that beautiful too?"

"Yes," said Lis.

"Whew!" Pareys laughed.

"Don't be silly, Lis," put in Yetta, ashamed.

"Yes, it's beautiful," said Lis, getting red. "It's all grey. There isn't any colour in it at all."

Pareys nodded. "Right you are. Now walk round slowly—take your time—and tell me what's the most beautiful bit of colour in this room. Meanwhile, we'll have something to eat—eh, Yetta?"

"The Nuremberg cakes!" cried Yetta.

"Lebkuchen? Why not? They are so good and so unwholesome, there's a double pleasure in eating them. You sympathize with me there."

"No, no," protested the girl.

"Yes, yes. Doing a thing because it's unreasonable is the one zest left to money-spending in these money-getting days. *How* you'll develop the instinct when you've got the means! Job, get us some hot chocolate! And the German box of cakes. Now, I've put in all this Chinese flummery just because it's so delightfully incongruous. And I stay here in the winter because I'm the only Summer-fly left. And Job Boonbakker's my Chinese servant, because he's an unmitigated farce!"

"What's 'incongruous'?" asked Yetta, rubbing her cheek gently against the silk of the divan.

"You are, at Boldam. And that boy is, going round the cabinets. The incongruous is the base of the picturesque."

"Well, I'm glad I'm picturesque," said Yetta.

"Be glad. You have much right. *Very* much right. You are more than picturesque. You are a picture. A picture I sometimes want to draw—to my breast! Well, boy,—what's your name?—have you fixed your choice?"

"Yes," said Lis, standing afar. "I like this pink and gold box best. I like the pink."

"George! the boy has fixed on the one really fine thing—the bit of old rose! It is exquisite, isn't it? Here's your prize." He extracted a gold piece from his pocket and held it aloft. "Ever seen this before?"

"No," said Lis.

"I thought not. It'll pay for the damage to the box—eh, Yetta?"

"Gold!" said Lis.

"Look at the lad's face! And to think that I, at his age, had more than I knew what to do with! Hear them jingle, Lis! And never a single one earned in my life. That's the joke. To think that at this moment a lot of sallow-faced wretches are earning them for me—in furnaces, at Amsterdam—a hell of a place! That their share is the work, and that mine is the dividends!" He laughed. "What a world it is! They get one a-piece now and then, just to keep body and soul together, whilst I get the rest to make *this*!"—he swept his hand round the embroideries. "All beauty grows up out of—muck," he said. And he threw up half a dozen gold pieces rapidly, one after another, and caught them all in one hand, as they successively fell.

"There!" he said, triumphantly, "I can catch them as they come, you see. Not everybody can do that. Here, boy!"

Lis's hands went behind his back. "I haven't worked," he said.

"Neither have I."

"Is there a boy inside the furnace?" said Lis.

"George! Not inside. Yetta, your hero is a fool! You didn't earn the box, boy."

"But I did," said Yetta.

Pareys whistled, uncomfortably. "Don't move your arm," he said. "I'll draw it just like that, against your cheek. That'll pay for the mending."

"No, you mustn't draw it any more." Yetta flung the drapery over her shoulder. "Never again,"

"What nonsense! Why——"

"Never mind. I'm never coming again. But I want you to be good to Lis here."

Lis drew a deep breath.

"I certainly shall not."

"You can buy a couple of his drawings. See how good they are." She drew a thin leather case from under her bodice, and without noticing the taunt "Do you wear them next your heart?" she spread out the crumpled smudges on a little lacquer-stand.

"Oh!" remarked the artist, looking down askance. "So I'm to pay for these ten times their weight in gold? Nobody ever paid a penny for anything of mine."

"You see what they're meant for?" prompted Yetta.

"Turn them upside down, or sideways, and say they're clouds."

"They are clouds," interposed Lis resolutely. "This is the heath, and this is the mist, and this is the wrack overhead."

"Oh, is it? And here is the chocolate, and this is the cream on top, and this is the steam overhead. And did you ever see such a magnificent gentleman as Mr. Job Boonbakker, who ought to be Lord Chamberlain to the Emperor Foo-Chow?"

Certainly the red-faced Dutch boor, who stumbled about, impassive, in the costume of a Celestial, with a black tail to his yellow hair, might have made a success on any variety stage in the world.

"No, Mr. Job—I would call him 'Ah Sing,' Mr. Lis, *only* he can't remember that means him—no, Mr. Job, I don't want chocolate. You might have remembered that, and brought me my liqueur." The peasant moved like an automaton out of order, irresistibly but confusedly conforming to every change in his ruler's voice.

"And now to punish you, you are going to carry away that cup again," said Pareys, with half-closed eyes, "and you are not going to drink the contents, as you hope, but you are going to spill them—no, not on my Chinese matting!

—you are going to wait till you reach your mother's red tiles, and there—*now*, you are going to drop the cup—no, you're not—yes, you are—mind now, you stupid—there ! ”

The unhappy Chinaman, who had been slanting the little tray and righting it, to order, now dropped the cup with a crash to the floor.

“That's right. The performance is over. You may go and sit by the window, on the ground, Ah Sing ! ” Lis choked in the hot chocolate, looking anywhere, away. “You see what I can do,” said Odo to Yetta.

“Was it worth doing ? ” answered Yetta, biting her cake.

Pareys did not take up the challenge. He contented himself with ladling a spoonful of chocolate out of Yetta's cup and spreading it in waves over Lis's best drawing.

“Now, what does that represent ? ” he asked.

“Nothing,” said Lis, his mouth full of Lebkuchen.

“Yes, it does. Guess.”

“I suppose, sir, you mean it for the sea. But the sea isn't like that.”

“Why, Lis, you've never seen the sea ! ” cried Yetta.

“I've seen it in pictures lots of times. The sea goes back. It has depth—down”—he thrust with his finger—
“down away—deep into the back.”

Odo Pareys caught up the paper in a ball and aimed it across the room on the head of Job Boonbakker. “Come, fool ! ” he called. “Now, Yetta, I am going to draw that arm of yours, as you're here.”

Yetta hurriedly again hid, cake and all, under the hanging.

Pareys rose : he came towards her. “How lovely and wicked you look ! Is it really the last time ? Nonsense. Then, before I draw the most beautiful hand in Holland, for the last time, you are going to let me kiss it, for the first ! ”

“Sit down, Mynheer Pareys,” answered Yetta. “I was wrong to come this last time. Oh, so wrong ! ”

“You certainly were to come and say it was the last

time! Do you think I'm a stone, you wild beauty? Be kind to me: take off that cloth!" He changed his tone. "If you don't, you will hurt me very much."

"I can't. I've promised."

"And therefore I shall be compelled to hurt—your protégé."

"What do you mean?" Yetta's voice came thick.

"Job, take this young gentleman to the window. And, when I say 'Now!' apply the Chinese Torture to his thumbs." The boy fought, like a kicking rabbit, in the great boor's grasp.

"You are mad!" cried Yetta, with the curtain about her, half rising from the couch. "Help!"

Pareys smiled. "Old Father Boonbakker is deaf," he said. "And old Mother Boonbakker—don't hear. Shall we pinch the boy or paint the girl?"

"Don't mind, Lis! He won't hurt you!" she gasped.

"Won't he?" said Pareys. "Then you'll take out your arms!"

The girl cast an eye on the stand in front of her. "So be it," she said, but the fierce rush in her throat caused him to quail. She glanced across to the window where Lis struggled, silent. "The moment that brute hurts the boy, I—free—my—arms."

"All right! Let's leave off! It's quite funny," he laughed. "You're stronger than I. I didn't begin right. Violence isn't my line. Loose the boy, you fool! Would you really have flung yourself on me with that knife, Yetta?"

"The moment you said 'Now!'"

"So this is our last interview—for the present. Let's shake hands. And the boy may keep his box—for his funk."

Lis came forward slowly, seriously, gazing with grave eyes at his tormentor. When close by, he lifted the box over his young head and let go. The two dogs started from sleep, barking wildly. Lis gazed straight at Pareys.

"Bravo!" cried the latter, clapping his hands: the dogs barked the louder. Yetta clapped her hands too, half caught in the drapery. "What are you going to be, Lis, when you grow up? A soldier?"

"A grocer," said Lis, between his teeth.

"But what would you like to be? Don't bear malice! You've licked me fairly."

"A house-painter," said Lis.

"A ——? Oh, I see. And paint houses — large. You wouldn't care about painting them small?"

"I don't understand. Yetta, let us go home."

"Quite right. Take away your young friend, Yetta: he has bored me. And don't let him come back without you, for he has bored me exceedingly. Oh yes, *you* will come back. But you may send me his father to-night at nine o'clock precisely. And be very sure to tell him that he mustn't forget to come."

The Chinaman Job let the pair out and stood watching them depart. It was he who had written the anonymous letters: he didn't want to have any one coming fooling round his own especial property, his master, Pareys.

VII

"AM I at home to—who?—what?" spluttered Odo Pareys, waking up amid the fumes of his twentieth cigarette. "What happens, in this place, to the person who says he is not at home? What is your position, Mother Boonbakker, towards that social technicality 'not at home'?"

When Mother Boonbakker lost her depth, she always landed on morality. "My position is," she replied, "that a immortal soul should talk sense."

"And a mortal soul, oh immortal Mother B.?"

"My position is, that nonsense is pleasant, but that a mortal soul should come to his senses when he can."

"There's a compliment hidden in your conclusion, for which I thank you, Mother B. But according to your creed in these parts, as I understand it, we shall have plenty of time for that, so to speak, in eternity. Am I wrong?"

"Gentlefolks are never wrong," replied Vrouw Boonbakker sagely. "Not on this side," she added, with sardonic delight.

"Mother B., no one, to see your pink face, would think your soul was black. You are a fair, fat fraud. Did I understand you to say that somebody was waiting outside?"

"No, indeed," replied Vrouw Boonbakker, scared at the mere thought. "She is sitting in my warm kitchen, converting my cow-girl, and *that*'ll take time. It'd be a pity, too," added the Vrouw, "just at present. The cow-girl's enjoying her youth, as young people should."

"Converting? Who? Yetta?"

"Your mind runs where it can't go, Mynheer Pareys. Yetta Donderbus convert a cow-girl? To what?"

"I don't know," replied Odo humbly.

"No, nor better not inquire! It's you are doing the converting there, it seems to me—fie! Well, well, she's young, let her have her fling! I had, when I was her age. And earlier. And later. The older a person turns pious, the luckier, says I."

"Methusaleh, for instance!" smiled Odo. "Wicked up to nine hundred and sixty-eight!"

"But this is wicked talk," said the Vrouw, safely stranded. "Shall I show Mevrouw Dominé Donderbus in? Mind, every one has to talk good talk to her!"

"What an appalling time she must have!" said Odo aloud. He sank down among his cushions languidly, his way of bracing himself.

In no case could the lady's entry be reassuring. She was too tall, too aggressive, too ill-dressed. She glanced round the room: she deemed it an outrage, in a country of Christian homes.

"Sit down, Madam, I entreat you!" breathed Odo. "No, not there! I fear that seat has already been occupied. May I introduce my two very dear friends, Mr. Chow Bow and Mrs. Chow Wow? Mr. and Mrs. Chow Bow Wow!"

At this signal the two small creatures stood up and shrilled.

"Oh, I am so sorry! They never do that unless they take a special liking to somebody. Silence, you heathen Chinese! Can I offer you, Madam, a cup of tea?"

"I thank you, no!" replied Mevrouw Dominé, with extremest dignity. "Your time is doubtless occupied, like mine."

"Yes, indeed," sighed Odo, eyeing his slippers. "I have never a moment to spare." (That ought to make a favourable impression.)

"You certainly have an unwholesome look, as if you sat up too late of nights," assented Mevrouw Donderbus.

She glanced at the dogs, who had subsided. "Valuable animals, I daresay?"

"Yes. Rather."

"That might have been sold for an hundred pence, and the money given to the poor."

"Good heavens, they aren't——" Odo abandoned his thought. "Why—may I ask—do you say that?"

"Quite so. That brings me to the object of my visit. Some of us have too much in this world, and some have too little."

"Undoubtedly. Too much or too little what? Assurance?" (Serve her right.) "I mean, in case of a fire. It is always the one or the other."

"Of all that makes life worth living, Mr.—Pareys."

"She means 'love' or 'filial affection.' She is going to scold," thought Odo.

"Of peat, of blankets, of porridge."

"Oh no, she is only going to beg," reflected Odo. His manner changed entirely: he sat up from among his cushions, to her unspeakable relief. "I think I should soon have too much of porridge," he said briskly, "but not of blankets."

"You are humorous," she answered. "The world I live in isn't funny at all. It's grim, and poor, and wretched. Men starve in it, and women weep."

Pareys, who had begun shying bits of biscuit at the dogs—too lazy to rise for them, Pareys desisted.

"Tell me what you want money for, and how much."

Acquiescence always took all the wind out of her sails. "You don't live in my parish," she said sweetly, "but you come to my church. So I felt at liberty to appeal to you. My sale will be held at Meppel: there's nobody to buy in our poor little place."

"A sale!" he cried, horror-struck. "I couldn't possibly go to Meppel! I'll send Job, and he can give the things he buys to his friends."

"I must get the things before I can sell them," she

remonstrated. "I know you're an artist, and artists always have a lot of unsold pictures lying about."

"I'm not an artist. I'm only an amateur."

"Well, an amateur's an artist who can't sell."

"He can give the more," admitted Pareys gently. "And at a Charity Sale people will buy anything."

"That's just what I said. It isn't, as if people demanded their money's worth." Mevrouw Donderbus stared all round the room again, for spoil.

"I have a sketch here," suggested Odo solemnly, taking up Lis's grey smudge, "which might easily be made an object of great value for your bazaar. I will get a famous painter, who is a friend of mine, at the Hague, to sign it—the thing has often been done before."

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed the Parsoness, clasping her hands. "I suppose that's quite right?" she added anxiously. "I have so little acquaintance with the world of art!"

"Make yourself easy: it's quite the usual thing. The greatest living critic maintains that only two of the pictures in the Tribuna—you know about the Tribuna?"

"I have heard that it is a vulgar newspaper," stammered the Parsoness, flurried, "and that its pictures are scandalous——"

"No, this one is in Florence. And the great man declares that only two of the pictures in it are painted by the artists whose names they bear."

"My husband always makes his own sermons," said Mevrouw Donderbus proudly. "I am glad to see you, a man of culture, appreciate his gifts."

"I enjoy his preaching above all things," replied Pareys diabolically. "I like his—hesitating manner in treating the great mysteries of the faith." (I don't believe she knows she's got a daughter.)

"True—oh, how true!" exclaimed the Parsoness. "You understand him: I won't deny it. But I also won't deny that I and the villagers like a man to state the truth straight away."

"If he can. I agree with you. You don't mind my cigarette?" (Is it possible! thought the scandalized Parsoness.) "But the truth! The truth! Doesn't a man's thinking he's got the truth prove him in error! Well, I mustn't detain you. I think I have a few drawings—Job!——"

Mevrouw Donderbus, unacquainted with electric hand-bells, jumped at the entrance of the China-Boor. She would have jumped, anyhow, as that pig-tailed peasant stumbled round her chair.

"Get me the yellow portfolio. Put it down here."

"You think he's stupid?" said Pareys, as the Celestial, well within hearing, retired to the back. "He knows nothing except what I want him to know. That he knows exactly. It's very convenient."

"I think it's a disgraceful masquerade," replied Mevrouw Dominé indignantly. "I had heard something about it, but I couldn't have believed it to be true."

"If you're so unkind to me, I shan't give you any of these," threatened Pareys, as he opened his portfolio. "And just look how good they are. They'll go like—fire!"

"Hands!" exclaimed the puzzled Parsoness. "More hands! Nothing but hands?"

"Many hands make light work," opined Pareys.

"Arms!" cried the Parsoness. "Undressed? I don't think I could take those, Mr. Pareys, unless you could put some sleeves on."

"A fine arm, isn't it?" suggested the artist.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the lady, turning red. "I'm no judge of such matters. I never saw anybody's arm—to look at—except my own."

"Not your daughter's?" hazarded the artist.

"My daughter's arm, Mr. Pareys, is neither my business nor yours."

"I agree with you. You are quite right. I beg your pardon," said Pareys, quickly closing up the portfolio.

"Well, I'll lend you a helping hand, a dozen helping hands, for your good work."

"Give, you mean."

"Yes—do you care to select?"

"Hands are hands, it seems to me," said the lady superciliously. "I should have liked something coloured. Do you think I can charge a guilder a-piece?"

"Oh, by Jove, I say!—I'm almost sorry I—— Yes, I think you could, as it's for a charity. You see, it's a very beautiful hand. I'll send you the drawings. Have I kept you? I humbly apologise. Job, show the lady out. Now, behave yourselves, Mr. and Mrs Chow Bow Wow!" The dogs took up the signal: the Parsoness was glad to retreat before their yaps and snaps, so suddenly close to her ankles.

But she was much less pleased to run up against her own worthy (not that she would have accepted this adjective) husband, who looked even more discomfited than she. "You here?" exclaimed both in unison. Her explanation came pat. "I've been spoiling," she said aloud, "the Egyptians." He halted. "Mr. Pareys," he said, "I venture to look upon as almost my p-parishioner?"

"The lady was so kind as to tell me I was hers," replied Pareys, and beckoned to Job to close the door between the couple. "You don't mind my cigarette?"

The Minister stood inside the doorway. He was shortsighted and wished he could have seen more of that extraordinary apartment. He felt awkward, yet not out of place. "The smaller the dog," he remarked, very loud, "the more it has to say."

Pareys flung a cushion at the chows. "But of course you smoke, yourself?" he argued. "Job, get the good cigars, not those I allow you to steal. Dominé, you know my clown—Ah Sing?"

The Dominé bowed low to the Heathen Chinees (For their manners are so much more ceremonious than ours, he reflected) "Does your—ahem—convert speak our language?" he asked aloud. There was nothing

improbable in a Chinese servant brought from the Dutch Indies.

"With an atrocious accent, I grieve to confess," replied Odo, looking broken-hearted. "But I can't get him to abandon it, because his mother has it too—you know their exaggerated feeling of reverence towards their mothers——"

The Dominé cast a second, and much keener, glance at the red-cheeked Celestial. "Reverence is a beautiful thing," he said demurely. "Did you say c-c-clown?"

This twist was so entirely to the taste of Odo Pareys that he at once resolved to remain pleased with his visitor. He took his own way of expressing his satisfaction. "I may remark, perhaps," he said, "that I really am nobody's parishioner. My connection with the church is limited to my having been—long ago—christened in one. Then, I am told, I wept mightily. I don't remember ever having done so since."

"Is it that you have found no cause for tears?" replied the Minister severely. "Or, when life hurts you, do you—mock?"

Pareys coolly handed a lucifer-match. "I see we shall understand each other," he said, fishing with red stocking-feet for the gilt slippers. "You would greatly oblige me by sitting, or preferably——"

"A little more to the left," advised the Dominé.

"Thank you—lying down." Odo endeavoured to follow the advice beneath the table. "That divan with the impress of a human figure all along it is the easiest, after my own. I don't offer my own: I shall need repose, if you are going to talk—Church?"

"I am not going to talk Church," replied the Dominé, his gaze resting on the "impress of a human figure." "I am going to talk father—father of a sixteen-year-old daughter. That's why I'm here."

Dear me, *he* knows he has one, was Odo's silent commentary.

"Now, however, my wife has doubtless forestalled me.

A mother's intuition——" The Dominé felt his way, gratified to hope that this time possibly the Parsoness——

"Your wife did not mention her daughter," interrupted Odo in a tone of slightly muffled spite. "Of you she spoke with approval, on the whole."

The Dominé, provoked, pushed the slipper home with his stick. In doing so he accidentally knocked up against the scarlet foot. The owner of the foot gave a shout.

"Aha!—you do cry out when you're hurt," said the Dominé grimly.

"Before, if I can," replied Pareys, rubbing the toe.

"I fancy I'm more accustomed than you. A village parson—you can take that back with you to civilisation, Mynheer Pareys—goes on his way between two long lines of mirrors, convex or concave, never correct. He soon tries to be indifferent and to fix his eyes on the goal." The Dominé paused, and fixed his eyes on Mr. Chow. "But they mustn't touch his children," he cried, sweeping back the eyes angrily, straight at the other's face. "Man! don't you see the difference? The Minister's just the Minister. But the Minister's daughter's my child."

"Don't kick Mr. Chow, please: I feel it," said Pareys.

The Dominé drew himself together. "The girl tells me you have used her as a model."

"She has posed for me as lots of my friends have done."

"Those friends didn't live in Boldam. Imagine for a moment, if you can, that I am a man of the world, and that you are an inhabitant of Boldam."

Pareys closed his eyes. "I'll try. Wait a minute. I'm very nearly there. I don't feel self-righteous enough."

The Dominé laughed in spite of himself. At once Pareys flung up his eyelids. "Just so," said Pareys. "Not a word has passed between her and me, till this day, that mightn't have been heard by all the deacons in Boldam." How lightly he said the words, "Till this day!"

"I trust her for that," replied the Dominé haughtily. But the next moment his laugh, a bit less natural, returned.

"I can see the Deacons of Boldam sitting listening in a row," he said, "while an artist tells the Minister's daughter she has the p-prettiest hand in Holland." His face clouded over. "You have wronged us cruelly," he said. "She is a child, and you've set a whole countryside chattering about her. That is the truth, and you must feel it, if you choose. Spare me further details. In any case she will not come here again. I am here to tell you that. Circumstances have p-p-precipitated her departure for the College in which she is to be trained as a teacher."

"Circumstances have precipitated, not I!" cried Pareys, leaping to the outlet.

"Well, no, not you."

"I was sure of it. I never precipitated anybody," said Pareys, unmistakably relieved. "Your cigar is out. Have another?"

"No, thank you. Mr. Pareys, it seems to me, that you are better qualified for saintship in Boldam than you realize."

"No," said Pareys, speaking slowly. Again the two men's eyes met, in that disquieting way the Dominé had of shooting light into you, straight from his pure soul. "I am not self-righteous." He hesitated on the brink of a useless confession: then he righted himself, true to his own character, with just a slight wrench.

"No, I am frightfully selfish, but I'm not self-righteous. I can't regret causing a pain that was a pleasure to myself."

"Then I pity you too much not to forgive you," replied the Dominé promptly. His hand unconsciously moved towards those superb cigars on the table, but he hurriedly drew it back.

"Jove!" exclaimed Odo, slapping his thigh; and he shouldn't have done that, because it set both dogs yelling. "I liked you as a preacher before I knew you were too good to preach!"

"I am glad to hear your ears were fixed on my sermon"

whilst your eyes were all over the church," replied the Minister.

"Dominé, at least I had the grace not to fix my eyes where I preferred them to be."

"I am here, Mynheer Pareys, to ask you to give up those drawings."

Pareys burst into loud laughter. "Your wife's just carried them away with her, to sell all over the place!"

"To—to sell?"

"For some charity—she didn't say what!"

"The Church Bazaar!" wailed the Dominé. "The Church Restoration Fund! She can't possibly mean it."

"I must admit that she didn't recognise the hand. Was that my fault? I have even occasionally left a little ring——"

"Her grandmother's turquoise cross—so peculiar! No, Mr. Pareys, we shall not advertise these sittings. Pray accept my p-poor thanks for your contribution to our fund!" A fine scorn rang out at last in the Dominé's kind voice.

For a moment Odo Pareys looked completely non-plussed. That was a position he revolted from, the one sensation in all his smooth life, of pain. He never remained in it. "Sit down again," he said imperiously. "Hang your footling bazaar. Let's talk sense about that church of yours."

The Dominé, however, remained standing.

"Your church is worth restoring: have you got a good man to do it?"

"We haven't the funds." There was little humility, but the more effective humiliation, in the tone of the reply.

"But somebody's made an estimate? I have, for one. You can't do much: it was always quite simple. I've turned it all over repeatedly in my mind."

"Whilst listening to my sermons?" asked the ruffled Dominé.

"No, whilst not joining in your prayers."

"Oh, hush, hush!"

"Don't tempt me then. I'm not a good man: let me

do a good work. It's a delightful thought that *I* should go rebuilding your church. I shall have to spread the expense over several years. I don't want to feel it. Stop your tuppenny Bazaar ! "

"These things are not settled in a moment——" began the resisting Dominé.

"No, of course not. I'll send in my offer to your Presbytery. You can try and get them to refuse ! "

"I do not understand why you——" persisted the Dominé.

"Nor do I, quite. I do partly. Have you never seen the Devil eager in God's service ? "

"The world will talk all the more," said the Dominé. He held out his hand, but he drew himself up, as he did so. "You speak lightly," he said, "of God and the Devil. Are you really so familiar with both ? "

"One has told me about the Other," replied Odo.

"Better find out at first-hand, as far as you c-can," said the Dominé, and went away. Pareys lay back on the sofa without calling to the dogs.

VIII

NOVELTY was the daily bread of Odo Pareys. There is no more fatiguing search for mental food. But the most charming of novelties is that on which we hap amongst our usual surroundings, on our own native soil, where we least expected to find it. Pareys had travelled all over the vari-coloured world: he was new to the dull delight of this grey corner on the heath. Not that he could paint it: he could only paint Joseph's Coat.

But he could talk to it, and it to him. And the things it said or thought had rarely been felt by him before. He was a dweller in cities, with a youth spent, before years of roving, in Brussels and the Hague. The village church and the village inn had greatly diverted him: the Boonbakker family in their kitchen were productive of still more frequent amusement. The Parson's daughter, picked, like a sprig of heather on the heath, had lighted up the fantastic studio with the glow of fresh youth and full hope.

He had lost her a month or two before the inevitable stage of boredom: that was a pity. And the morning's final episode was a pity too, because a mistake. She wouldn't tell her father—or anybody. But he was an ass to think he could hypnotise Yetta because he could hypnotise Job.

He must console himself with the stolid, bright-eyed grocer's boy. The boy, when he got talkative, would tell a lot about Yetta. And the boy certainly, as she had said, saw things "different."

The next little novelty about these incommensurable people was the non-arrival of the boy's father at the indicated

hour. To Pareys this little incivility was quite a big discovery for, rich and prodigal from childhood, he believed every poor man's soul to exist in the monkey attitude of winking eye and extended paw. The grocer, as he realized with growing impatience, wasn't coming at all. At ten o'clock the artist dropped with irritation the brush he had taken up in impatience. He drew back from a couple of hurriedly sketched sepia seas. "The boy's right," he said. "I can't do landscape." Nor could he: such amateurish work as he produced was, if at all effective, confined to gaudy interiors: a bit of Turkish Bazaar or a Chinese Tea-shop. His fight with the greys and browns of old Boonbakker's ingle-nook and wooden face was a long-drawn discomfiture. He continued it, with all the obstinacy of caprice.

"I'll go and hear old Boonbakker grumble about everything that ever was or that ever will be," he reflected, gathering up half a dozen cigarettes. "There are few tonics like another man's grumble, taken in doses. I like to hear old Boonbakker. A good word for nobody, not even his Creator. Not even himself!" Laughing at this fancy, he threw open the kitchen door, and there, in the shadow of the single oil-lamp, by the smoke of the fire, opposite to old Boonbakker, snorting in his arm-chair, and the fat wife, humming (forbidden old love-songs) at her spinning-wheel, there, in dead, contemplative silence, sat the boy Lis, like a Jack in the Box, and beside him a grey little, mean man, doubtless the father. The unconvertible maid stood gazing at as much of her bright face as she could see in the bright brass of the corner-pump. The Chinaman stood gazing, not brightly, at the maid.

"Five - mi - nutes - to - ten!" said Simeon, syllable for syllable.

"Caught," said Vrouw Boonbakker.

"I told the boy 'nine,'" cried Odo angrily. "Little——"

"Don't scold the boy: he has faults enough of his own," interrupted Simeon, in his imperturbable manner. "It isn't that. I waited to see whether you'd come or not. At ten,

as I said to the Baas here, I go " (he said " goes ") " home again."

Pareys stared from one to the other.

" Yes, better let the Lord decide—in case things go wrong," remarked old Boonbakker and spat on the hearth. " They mostly do, whoever decides," he added.

" Nonsense ! " interjected the Vrouw, with a jerk of her flax. " Decide to do what you like, and repent afterwards."

" Don't decide and you needn't repent," persisted Simeon. The boy's eyes flashed from one to the other.

" The clock's decided ! " he burst out.

" It's seven minutes slow ! " objected Odo sardonically, with a glimmer of comprehension, how these queer people thought.

Simeon looked round to him, in critical calm. " Do you imagine," he questioned solemnly, " that the Lord doesn't know what o'clock it is ? "

" So, as it's now past ten, you don't want me to talk to you. Good-night ! " said Odo, turning, with a grin.

" Father ! " cried Lis, behind the receding back. Such a cry ! Odo turned again, touched.

Lis had sprung to his feet, in the open space, by the fire-light.

" You were anxious enough to escape this morning," sneered Pareys.

" Yetta told me perhaps you'd teach me to draw ! She said she thought you might teach me to draw ! You'd said something about teaching me to draw ! " cried Lis.

Odo stood away, enjoying the picture. " You're not afraid of the Chinese Torture ? " he demanded, with a rumble. " You want to walk into the lion's den ? "

" I don't care about the Chinese Torture, if you'll teach me how to draw ! " replied Lis. The torture no longer seemed very close to him : the lion he, subconsciously, held to be more skin than claw. " I can't do it : I've never been taught, you see ! " he continued eagerly. " Not properly, only at school ! I was getting on at school : yes, I was,

father. Oh, it was dreadful, dreadful that I had to leave off!" The supreme sorrow of his young life thrilled through his tones till it seemed to fill the hollow kitchen. Even the maid looked round from her brass mirror. The dead stop, the vain regret, the futile, tearful consultations with Yetta! Six months ago he had left school, and—left off!

"I've sat here for an hour, waiting," croaked Simeon. "I won't say the company wasn't pleasant" (He had hardly exchanged six sentences with it.) "Nor the tea," he added amiably, "good. Though I can let you have a better" (this with vehemence, for him) "at seventy-five cents!"

"I pay seventy-three for mine!" said the Vrouw, and exultantly checked her wheel.

Simeon hung his head, quashed.

"Go, Lis!" he proposed. "Learn the game that the lady was wanting to show you."

The lady was the black-souled, red-haired maid, whose chief crime (indeed unchangeable) was breaking things while she day-dreamed of lovers. Against the bare wall at the other end of the white kitchen she taught Lis how to throw up a ball and twist round, with a silly song, before he caught it again. She whirled him about, with her big arms, till he tumbled into them, gasping. Job Boonbakker stood gazing, open-mouthed.

The grocer bent forward: his lean hands trembled aloft. "You mustn't take the boy away from me!" he prayed. "You mustn't come between me and my boy! Yetta Donderbus says: He'll make a gentleman of Lis! Lis was born, says Yetta Donderbus, to be a gentleman! A gentleman! 'Tis the voice of the Devil in every woman's heart!"

"A painter isn't a gentleman," barked Pareys. "What say you, Vrouw Boonbakker? 'Tis the voice of the Tempter in every woman's heart!"

"My wife never troubled about gentlemen," interposed the old Baas; and he spat, from principle. The Vrouw

nodded nods of many meanings: her eyes sought her harlequin son.

"The finer gentleman, the freer sin," continued Simeon, suddenly finding pleasure in his preachment. "How hardly shall a rich man pass through the eye of a needle? Shall I change my innocent child yonder into such a wicked camel? Yetta says 'Yes, Yes, Yes,' but I say 'No.'" He looked askance, not without malice, at Odo's purple velvet jacket. A poor man might "get into Heaven" (through election), but a rich man could not.

"An opening's an opening," opined the Vrouw, patting her fat bosom. "And, as for your theologies, a man isn't rich, once he's dead."

Odo had strutted away in a huff. He heard the old Baas grumble cheerfully behind him about "openings down below," "pits," and uglier places. "I can play the oracle-game too," he said to himself. "The father's right, in a way, about gentlemen-peasants. If that boy misses his next catch, I walk straight out of the place." The unconscious Lis, in a seething struggle of achievement, as usual, twirled round to the dancing thud of the ball. "Hurry up!" screamed the laughing girl. With little squeaks and shrieks she jumped to help him: her manifold pink petticoats ballooned around the boy. The Chinaman clapped his big Dutch hands.

"Ball, ball,
Rise and fall!
Fall and rise!—"

"Caught!" screamed the girl.

"Caught!" bellowed the Chinaman.

"Caught!" said Pareys. Thus was fortune—or fate—caught by Lis Doris, of Boldam.

Pareys stood near the door. "The boy can come to me to-morrow at ten," he said, "for his first lesson. If I'm still in bed, he can wait." He lingered, for a word of thanks. Lis ran up, breathless.

"And what, please, are you going to pay?" replied Simeon, setting down, with a heavy sigh, his cup of cold tea.

"Pay!"

"Yetta had frightened me by saying you were going to send Lis to some far foreign school. If it's only to have him here a bit, I don't mind so much. But what, please, are you going to pay?"

"You don't understand. I propose to teach him."

"Surely you don't intend to take up the poor child's time for nothing, sir?"

Odo smiled down into the fragrant bowl, just handed him by the serious Vrouw. The incongruous being his hobby, he felt that protest on his part would be too harsh an incongruity. Was not the pleasantry of the peasantry, as he styled it, the salt of his existence in this place? He turned to the other's standpoint with an effort—

"What do you pay that poor thing for the right to make a fool of him?" The Elder had risen and pointed to the sheepish Celestial, limp against the kitchen wall.

"Civil words, Mynheer What's yer Name!" cried the farm-wife, thrusting back her wheel. "Hold up your head, Job! Why don't you hit back, Job? The biggest fool's an old fool that calls other people fools, says I!"

"So you think I ought to pay?" asked Odo of Lis.

"Please, sir, I must do as father says. And I'm very sorry I was rude this morning. And oh, I should like to learn."

"So you shall, by George and by Jove!" said the wilful Pareys. "Ay, and by Jack and by Jill!"

The little grocer lifted a hortatory hand. "Pay me as much per hour as you pay that poor unfortunate, and you can have the boy of afternoons to play with. And the Lord forgive you for swearing! By the wooden idols of Babylon!"

Lis Doris humbly accepted the artist's proffered hand. "Ow!" squeaked Pareys. "You're too strong a man for me, Lis Doris." He adjusted his rings.

So the grocer's boy was paid handsomely to learn drawing: the money hired another boy to go round with the cart. In the whole neighbourhood only one person, the Dominé, disputed the reasonableness of such purchase of a poor man's time. And he had not been informed how irregular the lessons were. Hap-hazard, yet widely instructive, for Odo, who could do little, knew much. The father's "rheumatiz" stiffened, as the quiet months passed on. Of mornings Lis sold in the shop and did the work of the house. In the afternoons he trudged over to Aldervank, worked with Odo, if Odo felt inclined, or otherwise, to his own delectation, attempted clouds, moorland and sheep. Pareys would be kind to him in a careless way at first, but it was soon manifest, that the master tired of the plodding pupil. Of the laborious church restoration Odo also wearied, till he could hardly stand the Dominé's (and the captious Presbytery's) continuous strain. It was his conscious habit to get bored. When the summer holidays came round, they did not bring Yetta. She went to stay with an aunt in the Hague. "An openly irreligious woman!" said the Parsoness; but what did that matter with so secretly irreligious a girl as Yetta? Translated, this means, for instance, that Yetta used a hairwash, and the aunt a dye.

After a few months Odo disappeared. The "distinguished calm" of winter he had been able to endure, but the northern summer with its grey attempts at gaiety was beyond him. He fled to Japan, and he carried his hypnotised Celestial along with him, though old Mother Boonbakker clung to the creature's ample skirts, and the milkmaid's arms were entwined around its heart. Even the milkmaid, however, was not more quickly consoled than Vrouw Boonbakker, who boasted, within a week, of her son's triumphs amongst "Mandarines." "We're young only once," said Vrouw Boonbakker. The milkmaid tossed her head and agreed.

The two dogs (which bored him) Pareys sent to Lis in their red-cushioned basket, and under the cushion he placed an envelope with several ten-guilder notes "for more and

better lessons." It is to be regretted that Mr. Chow Bow (bored in his turn) enlivened the journey in the carrier's cart by counting the bank-notes and eating one of them. The others were pieced together again and paid. But not one of them found its way into the pocket of a drawing-master.

IX

"**T**OWN GENTLEMEN" are the bane of Boldam. There is no more buzzy beast than the Summer-fly.

Every summer, wet or fine, city sticks and town-bred noses come poking into all sorts of inevitables that everybody prefers to ignore. The female "town gentlemen" are the worst. They spend their money at Aldervank, as a rule: their advice they spend in "squalid," "insanitary" Boldam. Philanthropy is their impulse, the fashion and the fad of the age. "We mustn't be selfish," they say. "Pleasure for ourselves must mean profit for the poor." Their talk is of hygiene and health. When they drop away in the autumn, they leave tricklings of discontent in every hovel they entered.

Old Doctor Slik from Meppel, who comes every year to Aldervank, could not therefore have passed by Simeon Doris, stiff in his shawls at his door in the July sun, without pausing to inspect him. This little crooked-legged, crooked-faced physician is the best-known figure in Meppel. The post-office says his full name is Slikenstik, but nobody believes the post-office. Your name, after all, is what people call you. Dr. Slik has built up his entire reputation on one reiterated dictum. "I," he says in season and out of season "have a pair of eyes in my head." He states the fact so often, that people remember it. "Dr. Slik," they will tell you, "has a pair of eyes in his head." "My legs may be crooked, but my eyes can see straight," says Slik. The first half of the proposition is so manifestly true, that everybody swallows the second. "All things come straight in the end," is a proverb of the Dutch Boer in Europe or

Africa. At Meppel they qualify the statement. "Excepting the legs of Dr. Slik," they add. His eyes are protuberant balls: he makes a comfortable income out of them. But he hurries off no less fast to the most impecunious patient.

"Crooked legs can take short cuts," says Dr. Slik.

"And what is the matter with you, my man?"

Simeon lifted leisurely eyes to the queer, squeaky Punch in the roadway. He was nobody's man, but he was a Bible Christian.

"The rheumatiz," he said civilly. "Bad."

"The rheumatiz, is it? Poor fellow! Can you walk?"

"Yes, I can walk. But my legs is that shaky!"

"Shaky with rheumatism! Dear, dear!"

"They feels as if there was balls underneath them. Sometimes they feels quite stiff, and sometimes they feels all undone."

"Dear, dear, there's strange feelings in rheumatism," said Dr. Slik. "Would you look me in the face, my man?"

The grave grocer obeyed readily. He looked everybody in the face.

"That's right. Fix your eyes here. Now blink! Blink in the sun—ah! I like to meet a man who can stare straight at me! I've a pair of eyes in my head, myself. Good-day!"

Dr. Slik went stumbling off along the sunlit street: the sick man shivered in his shawls, as he gazed after the crawly Summer-fly. Buzz, buzz, and nothing behind, like the rest of them. The serious-minded peasant never buzzed. There was no more serious-minded peasant than Simeon Doris, Sinner. "Of whom I am chief," saith the Apostle (not Saint) Paul, thereby proving that there exists no proportion, no real more or less. Simeon called to Lis to come and read from the stern Amos, his favourite prophet, St. James of the Old Covenant, the man of wholesale condemnation, with an occasional inconsequential ("interpolated," says, but not to Boldam, the Dominé) universal bit of promised felicity. Oof! There are few things so intellectually entangling as a prophet.

Slik was running about again in Meppel, seeing straight and running straight amongst the villas and the slums, when the report reached him, by accident, of the rumpus at Boldam. How untrue it is to speak of the monotony of villages. Nowhere in the big world are such thrills! Suddenly the whole life of the place bursts through its dull crust, a volcano of human heats in eruption. The Aldervank landlady who supplies Mrs. Slik with winter eggs had it not in her to keep down this bubble of news. At the bottom of her weekly bill she scribbled it. "Elder Doris of Boldam has been up before the Presbytery for *distemperance* at the Table. He's to be publicly *insured* to-morrow morning." Mrs. Slik replied immediately, on a postcard: "How interesting! Two of the eggs were broken. The market price here is six cents." She told all of it to the Doctor, over his dinner.

"Intemperance? I thought so," said the Doctor, and filled his glass.

"It's a warning, Slik," suggested the lady cheerfully. "And, pray, how could you think so, when you'd never heard of the man?"

"It's always intemperance. I mean, they always think it is, at first."

"An Elder!" sighed the lady.

"Exactly. I shall have to go to Boldam to-morrow—to see a patient."

"Which patient? You hadn't any patient!" exclaimed the lady, bristling.

"Yes, I had. By-the-bye, I saw some fresh eggs this afternoon in a shop-window at five cents and a half, Matilda."

"Where? What? How did you know they were fresh?"

"It's a new business. You can go in and wait to see them laid."

"Did you?" demanded the famous house-keeper.

"I?—with half a dozen cases clamouring round the corner? But I noted the name."

The Doctor referred to his pocket-book: the lady had forgotten Simeon Doris. Next morning early she sat patiently watching a Noah's Ark full of poultry. The Doctor disembarked in the silent centre of Boldam.

Over the wintry solitude of the village hung a cloud of desolation. A look of silent catastrophe filled the quiet windows, closed upon the deserted streets. Strange Sabbath repose on the week-day, and more than Sabbath emotion. In a grass-grown corner played, heedlessly, a couple of children, laughing and screaming: far away sounded, desperately persistent, the barking of some pent-up dog. In the wide roadway the Doctor, standing uncertain, gazed at the closed door of the grocer's shop. "They're all up at the Vestry. Over there!" cried a slouching, nodding carter from Aldervank. His cart rumbled by. Dr. Slik hurried across towards the church, muttering, as he went. "Crooked legs can take straight cuts," he said aloud, as he dashed round the parson's sty. And "the pigs!" he said also to himself, impatiently, but not of the reverend porkers, grunting behind him in calm performance of their reasonable duty. Dr. Slik was unreasonable. We all run down the wrong road in pleased ignorance, humans and pigs.

The vestry had overflowed. A goggling bundle of dark figures hung, knotted, against the door. All were pushing and struggling and muttering, in a hush of concentrated agitation. The little Doctor, driving ahead, pushed harder and spoke louder: the surprised crowd let the stranger elbow his way through.

The white, wainscoted hall, partly renovated with the money of Pareys, rose clean and cold above the sea of faces. They had turned, the whole densely packed mass of them, in the stillness, to descry the intruder. All the churches of Holland are whitewashed: the buildings, not the corporations. The tall, bare-windowed edifice gleamed in the fog: the concourse that filled it, from many a distant village, glowed, under outer gloom, with the hidden red-hot coals of

commination. They were all come to heap such coals on the offender's head—coals of pity and pardon and righteous wrath. They were pleased with him, for he made them pleased with themselves. The worst drunkard felt most. They were not Elders and, if they were, they hadn't come to be "insured."

A spy in a town-suit had no business among them: they resented his coming. The smartest scented a reporter and felt flattered: an Aldervanker or two—the Boonbakkers for instance—nudged some neighbour, knowingly: Slik!

Dr. Slik saw only the far end of the hall. The long table, straight across, with its green cloth and inkstands, and the solemn Sunday countenances rising behind. And below, on a stool of penitence, in the dust, the sick man, a white face through the mist, with the child clinging closely around him. The strained eyes of father and son were fixed on the central form amongst the judges, the Dominé, in his gown and Geneva bands, the only other quivering, suffering soul in all that emotion-tossed assembly. Father and son did not notice the entrance of the stranger. The Dominé resumed his reading:

"Whereas, therefore, by your own confession, you here stand convicted of the sin of intemperance, and not of intemperance only"—the Dominé's voice saddened at thought of his parishioners—"but the greater sin of blasphemy, presenting yourself, a Church Elder——"

A groan broke from the man on the bench, upheld by the boy. The craning crowd swayed in little ripples of semi-sympathetic response. One elder in the long row behind the table coughed nervously: another intently inspected his nails.

"A Church Elder——" the Dominé broke down—"at the Table in a state of drunkenness, to receive the Sacrament, causing a scandal——"

Word for word, the terrible accusations fell, in the living, listening silence, weighted beyond endurance by the sorrow of the gentle voice that uttered them. The minister laid

down the document. "What? Have ye not houses to d-drink in?" he said. "Or despise ye the Church of God?" Then they saw why he could not continue reading. In all that tearless assembly two big drops rolled slowly down his cheeks. Suddenly Simeon Doris fell forwards: Lis caught him in his arms.

"Simeon, even now, if you will publicly repent, the Brethren——"

But they had all sprung to their feet, to see. A new voice was speaking, clear, authoritative:

"Repent of what?—may a practical man ask a question? Repent of being ill?"

Dr. Slik had taken his stand beside the culprit's stool. Unwittingly he had laid a hand on the boy's head. An angry murmur arose against him:

"This man," spoke Slik steadily, "is ill with a disease of the spine. That disease causes him to lose the control of his limbs. He then walks like a drunken man. It is far better he should know these facts, than that he should continue to suffer as he is suffering now." Simeon glanced up, with a gasp: it was heard by the crowd outside.

"Dr. Slik," said the Minister, recognising the interloper—his voice quivered: "Dr. Slik, our poor brother himself has confessed that before coming to the Communion he took b-b-brandy——"

"A spoonful! I poured it down his throat!" cried the boy.

"The boy is a liar. All boys are liars. We cannot believe the boy," said the thinnest and sourest of them all.

The Dominé looked round quickly, in pain (an old pain!) to the thinnest and sourest. "I said in my haste——"

Dr. Slik finished the quotation: "All men are liars." And, now-a-days, he might have said it in his leisure. But that's neither here nor there.

Simeon rose. "It is true," he sobbed, "that I dropped the cup at the Table—Lord forgive me!" He threw up his

arms. "I *must* have been drunk!" He sank down again and hid his face.

"Dominé, I warn you, this excitement is more than the man can bear! Let me take him away!"

"Yes, yes, let me take him away! They are killing him!" cried the weeping Lis. "Oh, sir, let us take him away!"

"I am not weak, not weak a bit," said Doris, with lifted head. A mild ray of sunlight filtered slowly through the lofty lead-cased panes. It played along the watching faces, old and young. The boy followed it with tear-dimmed eyes. "How beautiful it is!" he thought, as it died away into the shade.

"The Lord judge between me and you!" cried Simeon: he staggered to his feet, facing first, for one long moment, the rustic tribunal: then he swung round to the crowd. "If I am ill, I am not guilty. He will prove it. Oh, Lord in Heaven, grant that I be not guilty, but ill!" He stretched out those lean, trembling arms again, heavy with the prayer. They fell, and he sank back against the Doctor and his son.

"Don't mind, Lis!" he still found strength to say. "I'm sticking to the Promise, Lis."

"The meeting stands adjourned," declared the Dominé, rising hastily. The assembly separated in discontented confusion. There was a general feeling of annoyance with Dr. Slik.

That gentleman coolly carried the invalid home in the single village fly, which the thinnest and sourest brother had ordered to be in waiting for the conveyance of his—the brother's—gouty legs to his own farmstead, three miles away.

In this cab the Doctor first noticed the prismatic blotches on young Doris's countenance. "Had a fall?" asked the Doctor serenely.

"Don't, father," said Lis.

"'Twas the boys as called after me, round corners,"

explained Simeon. "But he gave them as good as he got. Better—eh, Lis?"

"Well done," grinned the Doctor.

"Those Donderbus scamps won't begin again," continued Simeon with weary satisfaction. "Though an host should encamp against me——"

"My son'll pitch into them!" concluded Dr. Slik. "You mustn't talk religion to me: I can't stand it. I don't envy you yours." This view, which was new to Simeon, set him thinking: they drove on in silence the few yards to the little house. The Doctor watched every movement, as the grocer half stumbled, half fell into his back-room. The mental agony of the last fortnight had terribly augmented the disease.

"Far better to understand at once what makes you fling your limbs about," said the Doctor very gently. "It's not 'rheumatiz,' but nervousness."

The invalid closed his eyes, resting at last, in his big arm-chair: he looked very small and thin against the worn, brown cushions: his long face twitched. "The Lord'll decide if it's sin, Lis," he murmured. "The Lord'll decide. All the world's sin, but there's a sin unto death, Lis. I do not say that ye shall pray for it!"

"Doctor, nerves is curable—eh?" asked Lis, straightening the coverlet. "We can cure them, easily?"

"What does your own doctor say?"

"He says it's rheumatiz."

"He's a—doctor too. I don't say we can quite cure your father. We can do a great deal for him."

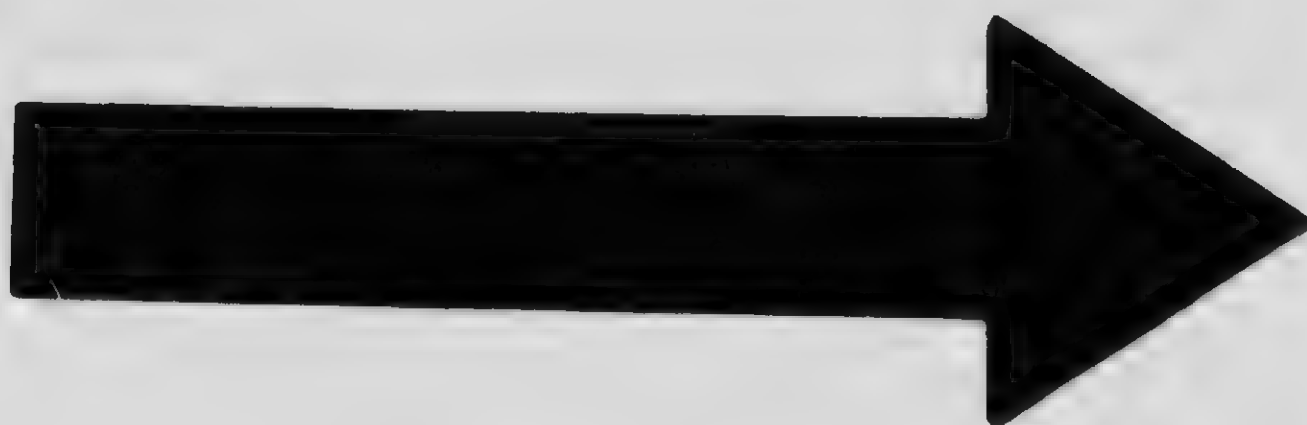
"How?" said Lis, warming some milk.

"In the hospital." Both saw the sick man, listening, shudder.

"He can't go to your hospital," said Lis very quickly.

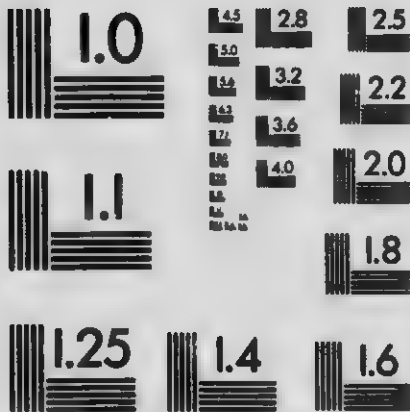
"Don't be stupid, both of you. Why not? Doris, listen to sense——"

"I couldn't do without him, you see," said Lis, his eyes on the milk.



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"Such a treatment at home would demand unceasing devotion," argued the Doctor, vexed. "Mind your milk——"

"It's just right," said Lis, taking it off the stove. "I have nothing else to do," answered Lis.

"And a machine which costs a couple of hundred guilders," persisted Dr. Slik.

This remark was followed by a moment of long hesitation. "He could have it," said Lis.

And that is why none of Pareys' money found its way into the pockets of a drawing-master. Lis tore up, unopened, two envelopes which lay at the Aldervank stationer's in reply to an advertisement. It is a long tramp to Aldervank. That he tore them up quite dry-eyed, as he thinks he did, is not true.

Nor is it true that he found the elaborate electrical treatment of his father's complaint a convenient thing. In saying so he verified the sour Elder's charge of untruthfulness. Dr. Slik did not believe him, nor did Yetta Donderbus. He obtained what help he could from the muddlesome local leech. The invalid trusted the Lord and inquired about his medicine. The days passed in querulousness, repentance, hope, acute suffering "treatment"—an intermittent strain. There was many a long hour of enforced absence with the cart. They were miserably, grindingly, unchangeably poor. In the slow watches by his father's bed or invalid-chair Lis drew. Nobody admired the drawings but Yetta, home for an occasional holiday after some exam.

"Lis, you will be a great man some day," said Yetta, dropping the drawings.

He grinned patiently. "How?" he questioned, expecting no reasonable reply. Nor did he get one.

"Somehow," she answered—cried out at him. And she stamped her foot at the quizzical expression of his dear, white face.

"Somehow!" she cried. "Somehow!" "Somehow!" She ran angrily home.

"To me he is a great man already, Yetta," said the

Dominé, bent double over Heshusius. But that sort of thing Yetta, though she fondly kissed her father, was, from the first, now and for ever, resolutely resolved not to accept for herself or to encourage in others. That sort of thing ended in parsonry at Boldam.

NO, the life of Lis Doris was not to end in "parsonry" at Boldam. To Simeon such achievement, even socially, would have seemed as the flight of the lark into heaven. Not that Simeon esteemed parsons to be better than other men. They were greater. They were great beyond the wildest dreams of a plodding grocer's lad.

The grocer's lad, of interest to no one but his father and Yetta, struggled on into his eighteenth year. As every birthday came round, Yetta sent him some small token, of her own concocting, and also at Santa Claus. She was now become a school-teacher at Arnhem. Already the airs and graces of that city had rapidly influenced her manners and her appearance. Holidays with the worldly aunt did the rest. In a word, although Lis was not as yet aware of the fact, Yetta had fully developed her promise of splendid womanhood, and she had learnt, unexpectedly well, how to dress, and to talk and to carry herself. This latter change Lis of course noticed, but he had never expected her to grow up like the village-girls. She wasn't a village-girl; she was Yetta of the Dominé, not commensurable with any class he knew. And now, moreover, she was a fine town-lady, like the best of the Summer-flies. That she was an absurdity as a public school teacher lay quite beyond his ken. She had always been his Protectress and his Patroness: Mevrouw Donderbus, suddenly awakening to furbelows and fringes, alluded to her own child as Delilah. On this occasion Delilah's pensive father drew his dressing-gown (with the holes neatly patched by Clasine) round his lanky

limbs and rose up to box (quite metaphorically) the Parsoness's astounded ears.

"She's forgotten my last birthday," said Lis, busy about the bed-clothes, after the sick man's nightly prayer.

"You've said that before, Lis. I believe you mind."

"Yes, I mind. There's nobody but Yetta. And the world's so big to be quite empty."

"There's me and the dogs," said the invalid. "Pull up the pillows a bit."

"Don't put yourself together with the dogs in that way, father. I don't like it."

"I love the dogs," declared the invalid. "They make company day and night. I'm glad the Town Gentleman left them, poor things. Come up, my pretties. Come and wish your poor grandfather a good sleep." The two chows, neatly kept, blue-ribboned, jumped on to the counterpane. It was Simeon's nightly pride that he still could manage, bungling and fondling, to unfasten the bows, ere the animals nested at the foot of the bed. Simeon had learnt to babble unending foolishness to the dogs. He had forgotten—and doubtless the Recording Angel had forgotten before him—that every foolish utterance must be written down against us, as it falls from man to child—that had never been his weakness!—or, still worse, from man to beast. He had furthermore learnt, in his slow illness, to reproach his son less, himself more.

"You're too old to have birthdays now," he argued. "Seventeen!"

"Yes, I'm old," admitted Lis, and moved (in proof thereof) the night-light behind the screen.

"Don't be complaining, Lis! The Lord——" The sick man turned suddenly from the wall, and grasped the side of his bed. "Lis, say you're happy! Oh, say you're happy, Lis!" He strained, in the shadows, to get a glimpse of the lad's face. "Say you're satisfied with life! Oh, the world's a sad world, Lis! Say you're satisfied."

Already Lis had flung himself down by the bed. "Of course, I'm happy: why shouldn't I be?"

"You've got everything you want, Lis!" insisted the sick man eagerly.

"Well, father—I've got everything I *need*. One can always want more, I suppose. Like Mrs. Chow."

"Women are greedy, Lis. You're a man."

"I don't think I'm greedy," said Lis meditatively.

"But what could you want?" murmured Doris: he let his eyes wander round the meagre room. "You've health!" he said.

"I could want my garden full of red roses, and my carriage with white horses, and—my lovely lady!" answered Lis, laughing. "Nobody can say that I need them."

"But, Lis, that was child's talk: you've outgrown all that."

"And then I've got plenty of things that don't belong to me, and those are really the nicest things to have," continued Lis, watching the hungry eyes that travelled round the paltry treasures of the sick-chamber. "There's the houses opposite, for instance."

"You silly, you haven't got those."

"Yes, I have, father, every day and all day! With the light on them that's always beautiful and never the same! You should have seen the moonlight last night on them! I nearly called you, father: only, you sleep so badly, you know. And the heath's mine, the whole heath, miles and miles of it, different and splendid from January to December, though Yetta thinks it's only fine when the heather's in bloom."

"The heath, when is that finest?" questioned the invalid, trying to keep up.

"Why, father, I've told you often. When it's all grey and dead, in a thousand greys and ten thousand deadnesses, all variegated and changing, without a break. All soft, and still and splendid. And, nowhere in the world, I'm sure, can people have such clouds as we have: all the immense

round heavens and all the immense round earth! And, whenever I get out to Aldervank, there's the trees, that we haven't here, the green mass of them! Oh, father, the world's divine!" He flushed and he glowed, with his words and his thoughts, and he stretched an impatient finger across the coverlet, and tickled the protesting dogs.

"Don't tease Mrs. Chow, Lis: she doesn't like it. Yes, yes, that's all true, and the earth is the Lord's, and the foolishness thereof. But——"

Lis tickled Mr. Chow, for, on the whole, 'tis those of us who stand it best that get most teasing.

"There's a treasure that's better than all yours," murmured Simeon, "and it's mine."

Lis was seventeen and a, rather unwilling, member of the Young Men's Christian Association. "Your possession's more uncertain than mine is," he ventured boldly.

"No, it's not, son. I'll tell you to-night, for perhaps I shan't be able to tell you to-morrow. Oh, I know I may go on for a dozen years"—he sighed—"but I may be lamed in my speech to-night, just as I was lamed in my one eye last month. How do I know that? Ah, you think you only know things. I found out. I shall be lamed altogether before I die. So I want to tell you now. Lis, when the Lord answered me *plain*, and told them all I was ill, not drunk, I was glad because of the Brethren, but I was far gladder because of myself. If I'd done it, drunk, then I felt I'd committed the unpardonable sin. Paul as good as says so, Lis. Oh, the awful weeks, before I knew! I couldn't bear to speak of it then: I can't bear to now. Light the candle, Lis!"

"Father, don't!" pleaded Lis; he struck a match.

"You were too young, Lis, to——"

"I think I did," said Lis.

"Heaven forbid! God alone knew: you see, He plucked me out. I couldn't even tell the Parson, who came so often. I begged him to keep away. When the relief came, the certainty, the disease—when I was struck down lame—I understood suddenly. I can't tell you how. Oh, the joy

of it, beyond understanding! Like a brand from the burning, Lis. God bestowed it on me suddenly in my old age. I knew nothing could hurt me now: I was one of the elect. I suppose I'd had double, as Isaiah says. We're all sinners, but I was saved! So I don't like the pain, Lis, but it's ten times worth having. The Promise has come true—such a promise! Life is all light now, compared with the darkness before I was ill!"

Lis lay against the bedside, thinking.

"You can't have that till the Lord bestows it on you, Lis, but my Heaven's a deal better than your sky."

"Yes, father."

"Heaven's all golden inside, Lis. All golden sunshine and warmth."

"Meanwhile I love the silver sky, father, and the cold lights and shades on my earth."

Again they lay silent, in a much longer, deepening silence. One hand of Simeon's feebly stroked the chows. It is beautiful to be a Bible Christian: it is beautiful to have the world before you: but both were thinking of next week's rent-day, of the rise in coffee and sugar, of pounds, in a word, and of pence.

They were so still that both had long heard the vehicle which was coming up the cobbled road. Its unwonted arrival did not greatly disturb them, because events that pass in an outer world do not overmuch interest the dwellers in Boldam. But when a conveyance of some kind stops in the darkness of night at your door—ah, that is a different matter.

The little shop-bell tinkled. The dogs rose, on the bed, and disapproved.

"I know those accents!" cried a voice, so loud that Lis in his turn, recognised it, as he ran to the glass door.

"Mr. Lis, I trust I see you well," said Odo Pareys. He was dressed in travelling costume. The Celestial stood behind him, rationally apparelled, and looking, on the whole, rather more in his right mind.

"Yes, sir, but my father is very ill." Lis half closed the door. Pareys drew back to the outer entrance.

"Anything infectious?" he questioned in alarm.

"Disease of the spine," answered Lis, who didn't know.

"That's all right. You will remember, Lis, that I cannot endure illness. Infectious or not, sickness makes me—sick." Speaking thus, Pareys walked into the inner room. "I must see those dogs again, anyhow." He explained. "How do, Doris? Feeling better, I hope?" The noise the dogs made precluded any reply.

"They don't recognise me!" exclaimed Odo angrily. "Pray, Lis, why did you?"

"You didn't abandon *me*, sir, please," replied Lis stoutly. "Five years is a long time in a little dog's life."

"That's why I was so curious to see them. They don't look much older. Do I?" Pareys flung open his thick travelling coat, standing close against the candle, away from the bed.

"A little," said Lis, blushing.

"Thanks. I know what that means. I've been very ill over yonder in China, and Job here nursed me through. So I no longer call him Ah-Sing. 'Twas the narrowest squeak, Lis. But, Doris, it hasn't done my soul any good."

"Hearts soften—or harden, Mynheer Pareys," replied a calm voice from the pillow. The dogs, growling, had settled down.

"You'll soon pick up in our air, sir," suggested Lis.

"And—you no longer call him Ah-Sing," continued the voice from the bed.

Pareys laughed. "What a passport to Paradise!" he said. "Go to Heaven, if you can manage to do so some day without discomfort, Lis, but never go to the Celestial Empire."

"I promise not to," gravely replied Lis.

"And why not, pray?—if you get a chance?"

"I never want to go anywhere even if I could, but to stay here," answered Lis. He didn't look at his father.

"I am ashamed of you: are these sentiments for one

who has the world to conquer? It's a good thing Yetta doesn't hear you. She believes in your future greatness, poor fool! Have you drawn a lot and painted a bit in these five years?"

Already the catastrophe was upon him, before he had been able to get the intruder away again, into the shop!

"What is the name of your drawing-master, Lis? Could you get a good one? Have you had the same one all the time?"

"Doesn't the talking tire you, father—so late at night?" demanded Lis.

"What's that about drawing-masters? We can't pay for drawing-masters!" answered Simeon, disgusted at the rich man's callousness, regretful for his son.

"But I sent you the money, Lis! I admit it was a stupid joke to go and hide it. Surely you found it——"

"I found it," confessed Lis, in desperation. "I—I had to use it for something else."

"That's a shame, Lis, and you know it's a shame. I sent it for a particular purpose," exclaimed Odo, losing his short temper. "Pray, what did you use it for?"

"I—I would rather not say," stammered Lis, distraught by this sudden exposure.

Odo Pareys glanced from father to son, and shrugged his shoulders. He didn't understand, but he was not the man to bother about spilt milk.

"Well," he said, "I thought you were more of a gentleman than that. I fancied the drawing would amuse you. If I had a milliard a year, I would spend it on helping people to waste their free time. When they've got their—what d'ye call it?—their eight hours day, they'll find out how dull the world is. However, it's no further business of mine, Lis. Don't draw, if you don't want to. Have the dogs forgotten their old tricks too?"

"I fear so, sir. We haven't kept them up."

"Why not, in the name of all that's unreasonable? Surely one has a dog for his tricks."

"I fancy we had them for their company. We love the dogs, sir. I think we forgot about the tricks." Lis looked shyly towards his father.

"They'd hardly be grateful to you for depriving them of their accomplishments. Would you, Mr. and Mrs. Chow Bow Wow?" The dogs, who had been lying curled up, flew erect and filled the small room with their noise.

"Heavens!" cried Odo. "They've forgotten me altogether, and they remember my trick! How curiously these heads of ours are constructed, man or beast. I suppose you're sure I've a soul, Simeon Doris?"

"Would you like to deny it, if you could?" replied the invalid.

"Well, but how about these dogs, then? Hush, Mrs. Chow!"

"I should like to believe it, if I dared," said the wistful grocer.

"Hush, Mrs. Chow!" put in Lis. The animal obeyed him. That annoyed Pareys more than anything. He turned away with impatience.

"I'm going straight on to my old quarters," he said. "I may as well take those brutes along with me in the fly."

Father and son exchanged glances.

"I had no idea I should stay away so long. You must send me a bill, Lis."

Job Boonbakker coughed.

"Not the dogs? You don't mean that you're carrying off the dogs?" began Doris in a breaking voice.

"Yes, my good man. You see, I've got this conveyance."

"Lis!" The sick man cried out, as we cry in our extremity. "Lis, he's come to fetch away my dogs!"

"Father's so devoted to them, sir," said Lis, drawing up all his courage from somewhere down in his boots. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind leaving him them just for a little?"

"Well, that's pretty cool," answered Pareys. "What do you say, Job?"

"We wouldn't pay for their board," said Job Boonbakker.

Pareys made a quick movement. "I'm lonely," he said, "and nervous about the first night in the old place. I'll leave you one."

The sick man gasped. "Oh, Mr. Pareys, we couldn't part them: take them both!"

"As you prefer, my good man." Odo motioned to Job. The place stifled him: it smelled: he was eager to get away. But as soon as Job stretched out a red hand, the two dogs, who were *very* snappy, bit his fingers to the bone. Nobody in the neighbourhood knew Job had such a voice. It was Lis who packed the wheedling chows into their day-basket and placed them in the fly.

Then he went back to the desolated room. "Put out the candle, Lis!" said Simeon, turning his countenance to the wall.

Lis undressed in the dark. He woke presently from a distorting dream at sound of his father's weak voice. A whisper from Simeon roused him at any time. And that, in so young a man, shows things to have got wrong.

"Are you awake, Lis? What did you do with all that money?"

"I used it to buy things, father. Things that we wanted."

"For the shop?"

A long pause. Then said Lis, in the night-light stillness, "Yes, for the shop."

A longer pause. "But how could that be, Lis? It was before I was laid up."

"Father, can't you trust me?" The cry rose straight from Lis's young heart.

"Yes, Lis, but the machine Dr. Slik sent—you said he—sent it?"

"Yes. he sent it, father."

After that each of them lay awake, thinking his thoughts.

"Lis, will you come and put your hand on my forehead? I can't sleep for wanting the dogs."

Lis obeyed.

XI

DECIDEDLY Pareys was the best kind of "Summer-fly." He came in the winter. True, he took four years to come, but he paid for his rocks, when away.

The first thing he did on his return was to fling out all the "Japanese flummery." He stuck up a notice on the high-road, that any bona-fide inhabitant of either parish might come and take his choice of a "souvenir." "I'm sick of the paper and the lacquer," he said. "Why, the whole place was full of Japanneries out there. Local colour doesn't do, seen in situ."

There was no disturbance such as indignant Mother Boonbakker had foretold. "And yet I can understand that a man wants a change. Like a woman," said Vrouw Boonbakker. "I've often thought they'll have to alter the dresses in eternity." She herself chose the Burmese settee, to sit opposite her lord.

The villagers crept in awkwardly and timidly, at long intervals, when once the news had been brought to Boldam by a passing carrier, who confessed that he had stared long at the notice before venturing to enter the house.

"It's true, you see!" he said, pointing with his whip to a large Japanese cabinet, already damaged by rough cording, on top of his cart. "I got that for my old woman's apples! The Town Gentleman sits grinning on an enormous red bale" (this was an ottoman) "smoking a cigarette. 'Take your choice! Take your choice!' says he. So I did."

"La! Dear, dear! Did you ever!" ejaculated the crowd, in a circle round the cart, and the upturned cabinet and the dejected mare. "Heavenly goodness!" squeaked

a ragged old crone, "would he have a bit of soft carpet for my bed?"

"Carpets!" reflected the carrier. "No, it's chiefly matting. There's heaps of vases and pots, blue and green, but few that'd be much use in a kitchen!"

Thus instructed, an increasing stream of prospecters filtered away towards the farm-house. They found Odo prone on the red ottoman, smoking his cigarette. "Mind," he said, "you may have only one choice." It diverted him vastly to see their confusion, their cupidity, their hesitations, their ultimate mistake. Etiquette, it was understood, forbade the (immediate) sale of the "souvenir." Vrouw Boonbakker, her feelings grown too much for her, locked herself up in her kitchen and scolded her dairymaid. Here and there, to this day, in some out-of-the-way hovel a gaudy embroidered hanging, much soiled, or a bird-covered vase, chipped, bears testimony to the crazy whim of Odo Pareys. Most of the things have long since been bought up by more sensible "Summer-flies." In one or two traceable cases their value has increased sevenfold. Odo's purchases had been made before the days of æstheticism: "Chinoiseries" were just "chinoiseries" then.

Lis did not put in an appearance. Indirectly Odo caused him to be informed of the notice. As if that were necessary! The whole neighbourhood was talking of nothing else. Odo took offence at the slight. It spoilt the fun he was getting out of the absurd peasants with their pots and kimonos. Shaking with laughter, he watched them from his window, as they solemnly meandered homewards, some of them wrapped by his own hands in the stuffs they had selected, fading away into the grey November gloom. He looked round with satisfaction on the barren walls.

"Oof!" he said. "Job, we can now start afresh."

"It will cost a great deal," said Job. The man, in his travels, had developed one quality, stinginess.

Had Odo Pareys possessed a conscience, he could have soothed it with the reflection, that however much his own

house cost, the church cost him still more. Shortly after his return he went to inspect the repairs. The edifice had been partially renovated, when, some three years ago, in his own fitful manner, he had stopped sending funds. The Dominé had been too proud to apply for them. A letter sent by the Presbytery had disappeared in the unknown East. The other day he had again forwarded a few thousand guilders from Rome. A scaffolding had been put up under the whitewashed arches of the ceiling. Some paintings had been discovered there. The Dominé wrote about them. Meanwhile the congregation once more worshipped in the Vestry.

"I came at once," said Odo, standing under the scaffolding, "on receipt of your note."

"The zeal of Thine house," replied the Dominé, "hath eaten me up." The Dominé was a good man, but he was not perfect. He had suffered intensely under the three years' neglect.

Pareys stared with all his might at the bits of colour in the dingy ceiling.

"What do they represent?" he inquired.

"We are not sure. Clouds, it appears, and, we imagine, angels."

"Angels!"

"Clothed,—let us hope," said the Dominé.

The eyes of the artist came down with a dash. A Protestant by birth, he could realise the meaning, to Calvinists, of this discovery of Catholic remains.

"You must retain them: you must restore them," he said impetuously. "Mind, our contract binds you to *restore*."

"Our contract binds you to nothing," said the Dominé bitterly.

"I am sorry. I forgot all about it over yonder. I—I had so many other expenses," replied Odo, with entire humility.

The Dominé, willingly apologetic, felt his sympathy dry

up in a sudden lurid intuition of exotic expenditure by a man like Pareys. He walked down a bit of the aisle, to recover himself, and back again.

"I c-c-cannot understand," he burst out, "why a man like you should do it at all?"

Pareys turned, cool and smiling.

"You Calvinists have no appreciation of beauty," he said. "I like angels, though I don't believe they exist."

"You believe in nothing, Mynheer Pareys?"

"I believe in life. How can I not, till I am dead? I find it, but for its beauty, a bore."

"Happy man, in spite of your limitations. I find it, but for its rather problematical goodness, a pain!" The Dominé sighed heavily. "No," he said, and the colour poured into his cheeks. "Far better, the world being what it is, to weep than to yawn! For the man who weeps can laugh, Mynheer Pareys, and the man who yawns can only grin!"

"Sir," said Pareys, "I forgive you, because your daughter is coming down the path yonder, and because I haven't seen her for all these years, and because angels exist." Stepping back into the church-door, he called to Yetta. The Dominé stood by.

"How you have changed!" said Pareys. He added: "But I knew you at once."

"Have you come to see the alterations?" replied Yetta indifferently. "It was time."

"I plead guilty. I throw myself on everybody's mercy. Now we must forge ahead. It appears that the vaulting was originally painted. We must paint it again."

"They have taken off more plaster: I wonder, could we go up and see?"

Yetta's eyes followed the artist's, up into the shadows. The Dominé cried out. But Yetta's love for her father was of the kind which speaks more than it listens. Devotion was her strong point, not docility. She laughed, and she said he was afraid she should take a false step, afraid she

might fall where she couldn't, and up the first ladder she laughingly went. The Dominé remained below, reflecting on false steps and falls. In a drawer of his study he kept, locked away, the hands and arms he hadn't felt able to destroy. He had never looked at them again. Yes, four years ago Pareys had compromised his daughter. People still spoke of it occasionally, in the malicious, unforgetting village. The Dominé found it difficult to think kindly of Pareys.

"You have thought of me kindly, I trust?" said Pareys, to the daughter, high up on the scaffolding, under the painted scraps, whither he had helped her. Not that she needed much help.

"I haven't thought of you at all," she answered, panting a little. "In my world, you see, we work too hard for such thoughts."

"Could you define 'such'?" Better not," he said quickly. "Yes, there are children here—look at this bit of fat thigh. Not children, so high up! Angels."

"A very different thing," she made answer. "I teach children."

"It is a mistake on your part," he said. "As I told you four years ago, ere you began the whole business. You were not made for a teacher. You are much too——"

"You told me various things four years ago that are best forgotten," she interrupted; she looked down from the dizzy height and closed her eyes. "I was certainly not made for what you told me."

"Why not?" He stood examining the frescoes. "Why don't you answer? Why not?"

"Had we not better go down again? I am sorry I came up."

He laughed. "The sexton has just called away your unwilling father. These frescoes are very much damaged. They can never have been good. Just a lot of clouds and a few angels, I imagine, done by a local genius—that wasn't one. We can go back, if you like, but I want you to promise

me something first. You are here for a week or two—over Santa Claus?"

"Yes: they have the measles at Arnhem."

"I heard that," he said with a meaning smile. "Promise me that you will come here every morning at this hour to see how the work progresses."

She paused to consider. "I will," she said at last, "on one condition, and otherwise I won't. It is that you arrange for the re-painting of these clouds to be done by Lis Doris."

"He can't do it. He hasn't learnt."

"He can do it as well as the house-painter who did it four hundred years ago."

"I doubt that. In those days all artisans were artists."

"They don't want art here. He can't paint the angels. Well, any one can do those up. You!"

"Thank you. But he hasn't time. And he won't take the commission from me."

"Then he must take it from me. He must make time. It's to have or to leave, as the French say, don't they?"

"But surely——"

"My father is calling. Yes, father. Shall I go to Lis about the matter?"

"But he hasn't time, I tell you."

"And I tell you he must make time. That idle man of yours can look after the shop."

"Job?"

"Is that the creature's name? If he paints up here, I will look in daily."

"And clamber up here to him?" asked Odo moodily, steadying the top ladder.

"No, I have had enough of this. I shall stay down there."

"And if your father forbids you?"

"I will convince him. Here in the Church with the boy at his work."

"You would convince anybody," replied Pareys.

"Yes, the boy will be up yonder, at his work."

XII

"YOU don't like him, Lis," said Yetta.

"I have no reason to love him," answered Lis.

"He has his peculiarities: we must take people as we find them."

"I prefer to leave them without looking for them, in some cases," said Lis.

"Lis, you are so stupid, I despair of helping you. Mr. Pareys is your *one* rope out of the hole."

"I am likely to stay in the hole. What hole?" He leant against his grocer's cart, a hand-cart, of course.

Yetta stood in the roadway. "What hole? You know as well as I do. Boldam."

"I think Boldam the most beautiful place in the world."

"Because you have seen no other."

"Just so. The place one sees is the most beautiful place in this beautiful world."

"That is very praiseworthy, Lis: and it sounds like a sermon, but——"

"A sermon! Oh, Yetta, how little you understand me! I'm miles away from a sermon. A sermon's talk, and I never can follow talk. My sermon's the world I see. It preaches wonderful, Yetta."

"I understand you well enough," replied Yetta, nettled. "I've known you from a baby, and I've brought you up: you never had more sense than an owl. You have big eyes and you stare at things—there!"

"It's true," admitted Lis, turning to push his cart.

"No, it's not!" cried Yetta hotly. "When you stare at things, you see them. Don't be silly, Lis. Mr. Pareys

wants you to paint the clouds in the roof. Any one can do it. He taught you a lot of drawing. And he sent you that money, Lis."

"And he took away the dogs!"

"That's a quality I was glad to find in him—his caring about the dogs."

"Poor father!" said Lis.

"Yes, I know just why you're so angry. But don't quarrel with your bread and butter: there isn't enough butter on the bread."

Lis kicked thoughtfully against the iron rest of his cart.

"Do you remember," he said, "about the boys working for him at the furnaces? It's years ago, the first time you took me to him. I don't mind: of course I know there must be rich and poor—but the way he said it! I hate his money. And his scattering his fine things amongst us now, because he no longer wants them! How he laughs at us, Yetta—the Town Gentleman! There's nothing shameful in your poverty—why should there be?—till Mr. Pareys comes by!"

"Well, that's true, Lis. He *has* come by, and 'tis shameful."

"He's the selfishest man in the world!"

"And I am the selfishest woman. Perhaps he'll be *my* rope, out of *my* hole."

Lis drew back the cart in amazement. "Why, you're a fine lady in Arnhem——"

"My hole is school-marmdom: I shall certainly not stay in it. Now, Lis, if you won't, it's because you know that you can't."

"Yes, I think I can. I think I can. It would be splendid, in our church—how pleased father will be!"

"And you'll be earning the money," she urged.

"That'll be almost the best of all! That money he sent, Yetta, throwing it to one, in the dog-basket, I've been saving all I could, to repay him, when he came; but I

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haven't managed it—oh, I was so sorry—now I shall be able to refund it all, with *this*!”

“You saving—how could you?”

She stung him, unwittingly: he coloured. “We *are* very poor,” he admitted, “but I did save, all the same. One always can, in small things.”

She looked at his threadbare clothing, standing there, in her astrakan jacket and muff.

“How proud you are!” she said.

“No, I’m not proud. Of course I wanted to send back the money I used for father’s machine. And I thought of the furnaces, and his laugh!”

“How proud you are! I don’t believe you’d take money from *me*!” There was an interrogation in the exclamation: her face hardened for a reply.

“Yes, I should. Of course I should. Why, you’re Yetta.”

“You might not always think so.”

“But I should. You would always be Yetta. Like a sister, only more so. You gave me the first paper I ever drew on! And my paint-box that I have used all my life! Don’t you remember? Of course you’re Yetta. Of course I should take anything from you.”

“I’ll remember,” she answered, nodding and departing. “So that’s settled. To-morrow at ten you climb up and begin to paint.”

On the morrow, then, at ten, he climbed up and began to paint. Not much better than a house-painter with “a knack.” Big grey clouds, like puffs of smoke. The apprehensive Presbytery, torn between love of pelf and dread of papistry, stipulated that no figures should appear in the ceiling that had passed the innocent age of two. Hitherto none had done so. It was agreed that, in case they did, they should be “restored” to infancy. Pareys, punctual as Yetta, said he’d do the angels, when he’d time. Lis was civil to his “former teacher.” The latter admitted that the lad was exceedingly civil. “D—— civil,” said Pareys to Job. Job was by nature and habit inclined to d—— most

things, notably his master, his sweetheart, and himself. There was no reason why he should except Lis. On the contrary, he included him, in italics. For Job, long accustomed to serve Pareys always and only, now drove over daily to Boldam with his tyrant and surlily, for an hour or two, looked after the shop. Lis was busy meanwhile under the church roof. Of afternoons master and man superintended the refurnishing of the despoiled apartment at the Holst, which was being sumptuously done up as a Turkish "Interior," with hookahs and brass platters and plentiful gilt scribbings from the Koran. "Travelling comes expensive, in this way," remarked Odo. "We shall really have to avoid the Levapt." It didn't matter to Job where he went or what he did, as long as he stopped—no, not "stopped," moved—with Odo. He had been a dull, hard-working ploughboy till Pareys had filled his life with cakes, cigars, lounges, drinks, freaks, folly and fun. To the fun he was impervious: he took in the good fare. Will he had none but to lie close by, and watch over, his lord, like a dog. All through the Japanese illness he had worked, like a machine. For the present he walked about in a fez and baggy trousers and answered to the name of Ali-Ba-Boon.

"As for that grocer's boy," said the brand-new Levantine, moving the lightest thing handy, "he's an idiot. He don't know how many cents there are in a stiver."

"Ah, you know that," replied his master. "It's the one thing you know, and you know it superbly. How many does Lis think? Four or six?"

"Four when he gives, I should say, and six when he takes," answered Job with fine scorn.

"H'm!" Odo lighted another cigarette. "Do you know, we both seem to be praising the creature?"

"Some people seem to think that it's praise to be called an idiot," grumbled Job, aimlessly punching a cushion. "They lay themselves out for it."

Pareys cast a suspicious glance at his hypnotised slave. "Be silent, Ali!" he said. "Sit down on the floor!"

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To Lis the unwilling assistant expressed himself with greater lucidity. "You idiotic idiot," he said on an early occasion. "I've had the whole lot of them complaining here like mad."

"Complaining?" said Lis anxiously. "Who?"

"All your regular customers. I gave them as light weight as I dared. It seems *you* give 'em over!"

"Not 'over,' unless they're *very* poor. But I let the balance dip." He pointed to the New Testament text, and to the Old.

"That?" Job opened his faint eyes. "That? I thought that was a trick to put them off! And, besides, you idiotic idiot, you don't count their cents!"

"I wish you'd call me something else," suggested Lis. "It doesn't prove anything."

"But you *are*—"

"I do count their cents. Mostly. Sometimes, when they're very poor, I don't mind there being one too few. It's horrid to tell a poor wretch that they're cheating."

"Heavens, what a time I've had with them!" continued Job, not heeding. "My master calls me an idiot a dozen times a day, so what must you be?"

Lis did not answer, but passed in to his father, who wanted him day and night in the room, on that side of the room where he could see him. Lis had been sanguine: Elder Doris disapproved of all church decoration with such censure as was left in his softening soul. Simeon Doris had greatly changed in these four long years of illness. He no longer advised his son, or any one, to do exactly as he was told: he admitted to himself that his life (as he had always felt and denied) had been a futile fight for the unachievable. Nor could he still behold sin in everything, since learning, in his own case, that men see it where it is not.

With these computations the son occupied himself as little as he might. "What's sin?" said the son. "Father tells you the whole world lieth in wickedness. As soon clean a towel that's dropped in the ink."

"Well, Lis, what would you do with a towel that's dropped in the ink?"

"H'm!" says Lis. "There's beautiful purples in a towel that's dropped in the ink!"

Simeon gently shook his head. All souls can see black and white: some can see purple.

The escape from that dense sick-chamber, away to the church-roof and the painted heavens, flung back the colour on to the lad's cheeks and the light into his eyes. They needed it. He caught himself whistling a dance at his glorious, anxious work up yonder: he stopped in alarm.

"Whistle away!" cried Pareys from below. "Change your tune!"

"Don't tease him: he doesn't like being teased," objected Yetta

"Like Mrs. Chow," answered Odo, spitefully kicking at the door of the pew in which they sat. They were alone in the church, the three of them, under the slanting sun-light of a bright December day. "You're absurd about that boy," he added. "Like an old hen!"

"I plead guilty." Her eyes wandered wistfully up the tall windows. "He's my interest in life—my amusement, if you like! It's so rare to have found one!"

"The local genius. Daubing clouds."

"I am not at all sure he is a genius. I don't care—much. But he is a self-chosen hobby in a world where everything—and everybody—else is just a duty."

"You are amiable about your relations."

"My relations are my relations: they surely are not self-chosen? I love my father dearly, but he is not a possibility. My father has achieved all he can."

"And I? Couldn't you take an interest in me?"

"You will never achieve all you can."

"Jove, do you mean to say you think I could?"

"I don't know. How can any one know? Of course you have never tried." She turned to look at him, in the stiff pew, where she sat, and he lolled.

"I know," he said, very seriously. "I couldn't." He changed his tone. "I'm twice his age: that's one thing I hate him for. I suppose that's a psalm-tu?"

"Yes, the twenty-fifth: don't you recognise that?" said the parson's daughter. She got up. "I must be going. My father doesn't like me to come so often, nor to stay so long."

"Wait till your mother objects," replied Pareys.

She smiled at him. "You are petulant, Mynheer Pareys," she said.

"Your mother's enjoying herself up at our place. The dairy-maid's got into trouble, and your mother accuses Job and is wroth. Guilty or not, I do not accuse him: still less am I wroth. Job is a brute, with a brute's instincts. So, probably, is the maid. You can imagine, what Mother Boon says. 'Sin first, if you want to repent!'"

Her smile was gone. "Mynheer Pareys, you are facetious," she said.

He half lay along the oaken pew-back: he caught at her hand: "I am neither petulant nor facetious," he said. "I am only miserable. Do you remember the old happy days—do you remember?—when I drew this lovely hand over and over again, and you let me talk nonsense by the hour?"

"Let go my hand," she answered, trembling with anger. She pressed the other hand down on the brass-bound Bible in front of her. "I didn't know it was nonsense then."

"Nor was it. Nor is it," he said.

A piece of plaster fell close to them, breaking in dust.

"Oh, I'm sorry," called down Lis's voice. "It went sideways."

Odo had loosed her hand. She was half out of the pew. He stood breathless.

"What do you want?" he gasped. "You have been playing with me all these days. Do you think I am a fool?"

"Not a fool, but perchance a madman. This is a . . . are you mad?" She steadied herself by the pew-d.

"A church?" he made fierce answer. "What does

the place matter, when a man speaks as I am speaking now? We speak when we can, where we can, and by Heaven, you listen! Yes, you listen and reply."

"Not always——" she began, but he wouldn't let her.

"Over yonder, at the Holst, when I praised your hands, praised your arms——"

"I was a child," she cried. "I was perfectly harmless——"

"But you liked it; it was true! And now you are a woman, and a thousand times more beautiful——"

"Yetta, did you call?" cried out Lis from his height.

"Yes, good-bye, Lis! I am going. Let me pass, Mynheer Pareys."

"No, indeed, I am taking this opportunity. To-morrow I may not dare! You may not come. I have said too much. Are you going through the Vestry?"

"No," she said. "I am going out by the great door."

"You will come again to-morrow?"

"No." She hesitated. "Not if you speak thus in this place."

"Hang the place!" he cried, clenching his fists. He went white. She faced him with level eyes. "The place isn't too good for you to listen, I say, nor too good for me to speak!"

"Do you think fit," she replied in seemingly reposeful tones, "to ask me to marry you here in this church?"

He stood aside at once, and she passed him down the aisle.

"I am your slave," he said behind her. "I await your commands."

She turned in the door. "You know that I neither love you nor dislike you," she said. "It would be a question of give and take."

"What must I give?" he asked, in the same hushed, hoarse voice.

"You are very rich, are you not? You would have to settle on me a large annuity, to spend as I chose. You would ask no questions."

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"Have you fixed the amount?" he asked bitterly.

"Not yet. I have thought, of course, of the possibility of this, but not of the actuality."

"You have made your plans?"

"Not definitely, as you perceive. You would not like the way in which I spent the money."

"Are we really arranging a marriage?" he asked.

"That depends on you. I state my own position clearly. I neither dislike you nor——"

"You have said that before." He bowed low. "I unfortunately slightly dislike and fatuously adore you. I think I will go up and have a talk with your protégé. He told me the other day, that you were sweet, good-natured, and kind."

XIII

"Santa Claus! Good Santa Claus!
What have you brought me, say!
Santa Claus! Oh, Santa Claus!
This is the children's day!"

LIS dropped the "Olive-Branch" he had been reading aloud to his father, before the latter fell into a doze. It was the night of Santa Claus: all Holland was holding high festival. Out in the street there had been bell-ringing, and hurried footsteps, and faint music. In the quiet back-room nothing had indicated a change. But now, suddenly, a hushed voice was busy at the window, in the yard—he looked up to listen. He had been musing on the good saint riding over the roofs of houses, in the starlit December night. Of the thousands of children waiting anxiously, each for his share.

"Santa Claus! Oh, Santa Claus!"

He crept to the window, moved the blind, and spied a muffled figure in the shadow of the wall.

"Come out, Lis Doris! See what the good saint has brought you!"

He recognised the voice, in spite of an attempt at disguise. He went to the door and the figure flitted before him, carrying a lantern, to the shed, several yards away. There, among the potatoes and the peat, under the rafters, it turned, with lantern high upheld, and in the fitful rays Yetta stood revealed, with a scarlet mantle round her shoulders, a long cotton-wool beard and a tinsel mitre, stage properties such as come naturally to some grown relation wherever

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half a dozen Dutch children foregather on this night of nights.

"Santa Claus comes to a good boy," said Yetta.

"How does it go?"

Lis laughed.

"Santa Claus! Good Santa Claus!

Oh, have you come to stay?

Santa Claus! Oh, Santa Claus!

What have you brought to play?"

he answered. "It's cold here, Yetta. Won't you come indoors?"

"No, indeed. It's a beautiful night. Santa Claus has come to see you. Don't you want to know what he has brought?"

"Not too big a present, I hope, Yetta. I've nothing for you."

"Well, it is a big present, rather. Remember, it comes from a saint."

"Yes, mine would not," said Lis, gravely. "What a wax you would be in, Yetta, if any one were really to take you for a saint."

"I should," answered Yetta, removing the cotton-wool. "But there's not much danger of their—doing it. I don't mind being thought a good fairy—for instance by you."

"You're more than a good fairy to me. Good fairies are uncertain, and you're sure."

Her cheeks flushed with delight. "Lis, you talk as if I'd done Heaven knows what," she cried. "When I've hardly done anything at all!"

He backed against the peat. "There was once a shed," he said, "full of all sorts of uglinesses, and a light came into the shed and lighted it up."

"Lighted up the uglinesses?" she asked.

"The uglinesses were there anyhow. They always are. They looked much uglier in the dark. In the light they were small, and harmless, and no longer in the way."

"You are poetical," she said, her heart aglow, "and allusive."

He laughed. "One has a right to be both to-night," he said. And, indeed, the majority of Santa Claus parcels are accompanied by verses and letters as frankly personal and impertinent as the ancient "Valentine."

"That reminds me of my present. You are not very inquisitive," she made answer. "I don't think I should give it you: only I can't keep it for myself."

"The slippers for father!" cried Lis.

"Why no, I sent you those this morning for your birthday, with your tie."

"I never got either," said Lis. "I thought you had forgotten my birthday."

"Oh, Lis, you—thought—I could—forget your birthday!" There was real reproach in her tone.

But he turned the tables adroitly. "Oh, Yetta, you thought—I—would forget to thank you!"

"We are children," said Yetta, "and you are the cleverer child of the two. Hush! It only remains for me to give you your present. Remember again: it is Santa Claus who sends it you. I have nothing in my hand, Lis. The gift that I bring is just all your future—your whole future life as a painter, Lis."

"What do you mean?" he asked, and his voice jumped.

"Just your whole future life, as a painter, Lis." She turned to him, in her red mantle, her eyes blazing: the gilt mitre fell to her feet. "That's what I'm bringing you—take it!" She held out her hands, one empty, one grasping the shiny lantern. "Take it! Yes, you shall have your life—you, at least! I've got it for you! You shall go out into the world you need, the world that has colour, and blossoms, and sun-light! You shall have your house with the red roses and your carriage with the white horses, and—the rest!"

"Yetta!" he had sprung forward, scattering a loose bag of potatoes. "Don't! What do you mean? Yetta!"

"You are going to learn to be a painter," she hurried on, "learn properly! We must see, of course, how and where. But the money is found! I don't know about your being a genius. I can't judge. But I know that you're different from other boys. Different from any one I ever met. You see things! When you talk, you see them different! Why, this is only just a dull village to all of us—a dull, dirty village in the stupid, grey heath! And our house opposite is just a stupid old house, that's got stains on it and ought to be whitewashed. You should hear Mother go on about the stains and the whitewash—not that she really cares, seeing it is *our* house—only she talks about the duty of the Presbytery—and when I told you, you said it would be a pity—the damp-stains were beautiful, you said!"

"But, Yetta, what do you mean? Yetta!"

"And you really think it! You weren't quizzing, because I always know when you quiz."

"Yes, I meant it, but I was sorry afterwards because I know it's not sensible."

"No, it's not sensible. And that's why you're different. And that's why I've hopes of you, though of course I'm not sure! Other people must find out. Other people will know, Lis! Oh, Lis, *you're* going to have your opportunity—at last! I don't think it can be too late, though you are already seventeen."

"But I don't understand," implored Lis.

"My only fear has been the time, the time," she said softly, as if to herself. "It was growing so late, and life is so short. They say you must begin early. Seventeen is surely still early enough."

"Oh, Yetta, you hurt me so!" cried Lis.

At once she responded. "I am going to be a rich woman," she said. "That explains everything."

"It explains nothing," he cried. "Have you played in the Lottery, and won?"

"A good guess, Lis. But now for the real truth. I am going to marry Mynheer Odo Pareys."

He didn't answer for a moment. Then he said: "That indeed explains—a great deal too much."

She set down the lantern among the potatoes. "You speak as if you didn't like the idea."

Again he hesitated. "I have always hoped you would marry soon, dear girl," he said, "because I know how you hate the teaching."

She caught at this view. "Yes, I hate the teaching," she nodded.

"And I suppose you love Mynheer Pareys." His voice warned her that she must make but one reply.

"Yes, I—am very fond of Mynheer Pareys. Of course."

"Why, of course?" He still kept his eyes averted.

"Would I marry him, if I was not?"

"No, I suppose not. You women are so odd." He seemed to be thinking it out, but suddenly he turned on her, so violently, that she almost shrank away. "Yetta, what has my future got to do with your marrying Pareys?" He waited, against the yellow half-light, with all the dark rubbish in corners around. She bent to pick up the tinsel mitre.

"Nothing," she said lamely.

"Yetta, what has my future got to do with your marrying Pareys?"

"Nothing, you stupid," she said, recovering herself, and laughing that sunshiny laugh of hers. "Surely you aren't so outrageously conceited as to think I am choosing a husband for *your* sake? Lis, though you *are* a man, oh vainest of beings, you're not going to tell me you imagined for a moment that you were quite so important as that?"

"No," he stammered, taken aback.

"For one moment! For one egregious moment," again she laughed her clear laugh, but now there sounded a taunt through it. "I actually believe you did! Oh, you men! No, Lis—no, dear, kind, good, charming, handsome Lis. I admit all your virtues, but a woman marries—she can do it so seldom, you see—for herself."

"You make it the easier for me," he said, quivering. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart, but I cannot leave my father."

"Perhaps not, but you could take him along with you," she urged, frightened.

He smiled. "Father has never been away from Boldam for a night. Nor have I."

She gathered her mantle about her. "Lis," she said, "you will not disappoint me. I have waited on purpose till to-night to tell you. I haven't even told my own father yet, and I don't expect him to approve. But I want *you* to approve now, first,"—she broke down—"and to help me through. Lis, it's hard enough for a woman to decide at any time—about marriage, I mean, Lis——" she paused, as if bracing herself. "You said pretty things to me just now about my having helped you a bit: now I want to ask this of you in my turn. Let this be your wedding present to me: let us put it like that, if you prefer. Say you will, to please me! I don't want my protégé to be a failure! Say you will!"

"Yetta, I would——" His voice trembled more than hers.

"Not would," she broke in passionately. "Will!"

"I'd die to please you," he said, and the words thrilled from his inmost heart. "But I must live, for the moment, to please father. I hear him calling even now."

"You can't," she exclaimed. "You know you can't in here. That shows how you fancy things."

"I feel that he is calling," he said quietly. "Listen!" He threw open the door.

"I hear nothing," she said, looking out into the starry night.

"Nor do I. But I know he is calling me all the same. Don't forget your lantern, Yetta!"

She picked it up. "What's the use of my lantern," she said sadly, "if you won't let me light your road?"

They walked towards the back window in silence. And

as they drew near, they became aware of the sick man's faint voice calling :

"Lis ! "

Young Lis stopped by the back door : he held out his hand :

"Good-night," he said. "Dear, dear Santa Claus. God bless you as you deserve."

She crept homewards. What was there left for her to say ?

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XIV

"MY dear child," replied the Dominé, "first tell me one thing: Did you expect me to say I was p-pleased?"

"No, father," faltered Yetta, disconcerted. "But I had a faint hope you might not be displeased."

"It was a faint hope," said the Dominé to the volume before him. "Well, when a daughter tells her father that she has arranged a son-in-law for him, with whom she faintly hopes he will not be displeased, then what must the father, if he happens to be a philosopher, reply?" The Dominé looked at Plato for advice, the sublimely contemplative Plato. "All he can do," said the Dominé with a sigh, "is to say that he shares the daughter's hope."

"Oh, father, don't put it like that: it sounds dreadful."

"I put it, my dear, as it appears."

"You might say, you have a little faith as well as hope, for the two of them."

"Willingly, my child, and also charity. Especially charity. Yes, the greatest of these three is charity."

"You are unkind," she said, her eyes dimming. He looked at her, quickly.

"No, I am not unkind!" he replied. "See, *my* eyes are dry."

"Oh, father, how could I think you would mind so much. Surely you didn't want me to become an old maid?"

"No," he answered, "though St. Paul did, and St. Paul was a very great deal wiser than I. But the worst of the very great philosophers is that nobody follows their advice. I am a small philosopher. Yet nobody follows mine." He

sighed. He found the silence so painful; Plato and Pascovius so unsympathetic, he was compelled to continue speaking, against his will. "I married for beauty," he said. "They call it love."

"Yes," said his daughter, softly, not coldly. "I am not marrying for beauty."

"Pareys is not an ugly man," said the Dominé quickly, hurt.

She smiled. "Dear father, for earthly happiness you love too wisely and too well."

He rose to his feet, spruce, clean-shaven in the patched, aged, colourless gown.

"Sweet one, dear one," he said. "My daughter! When we take a turning, we never know where it leads to, but we can always know why we take it. Unless we have hearts without brains. You have both."

"And where have they brought me? Where can they bring me?" she cried. "My heart and my brain? I am twenty-one, where shall I be forty years hence, with my life behind me? Oh, the children like me, at the school. I may honestly say that. Little Mary and Suzie I was telling you about will cry to hear that I'm going. But I'm going! Thank God, I'm going! There won't be a jubilee and a testimonial for Teacher Donderbus! My heart and my brain would bring me in a thousand guilders a year, father. I'm going to owe three times that amount, for myself alone, to my hand and my arm." She looked down: her gaze rested on both.

"You have reckoned that out?" exclaimed the Dominé.

"Yes," she said, and the arm reddened. "I have reckoned it out."

He drew her down into "Abraham's Bosom:" he drew her up against him, hiding from his own view the crimson sorrow of her face.

"I had no idea," he said, "that you wanted money. What is the right word?—missed it, needed it? Your mother thinks you are very rich."

"And you, father?"

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"I cannot judge, or compare with women. A man requires no money. I have food, and raiment,"—the Dominé complacently eyed the dressing-gown. "And more books than I can read. A woman wants clothes. I think you are always beautifully dressed, my dear."

"Yet I want money, father." Then, unable to endure his possible misconceptions, she said what she had resolved never to say. "I want it for others, as well as for myself."

"The boys are doing well," replied the Dominé. "We lack nothing. My Commentary on Job has met with such violent opposition that it has sold better than I could ever have dared to expect."

"I know the exact number of copies," said Yetta, hugging closer. "I asked the Arnhem publisher before I came away."

"What a business head you have, Yetta," answered the Dominé innocently. "Wasn't he offended? Wasn't that indis-c-reet?"

"So you see you can set your mind at rest," she continued, stroking his knee. "I am not sacrificing myself for my family. I am not sacrificing myself at all."

"Are you sure that you have not lost your heart to the lad, Lis?" replied the Dominé, covering her eyes with his hand, as he spoke. The hand trembled. He added hastily, afraid of his own temerity: "You gave yourself away, child, when you said you needed money for others."

"No," she said, not striving to remove the hand, but pressing closer. "I have not lost my heart to the boy, Lis. Not in the sense you mean. Not to the child, Lis. I am quite sure, father. I have reasoned it out with myself. I am quite sure. I have lost my heart to the life beyond, the life over the wall. Odo Pareys enables me to realise the desire of my childhood. I am in love with nobody: I am in love with life. And my life, you see, can only be selfish—my own pleasure. The beauty of my life is Lis."

The Dominé, though his hand still held tight, looked out of the window, into the wintry sky.

"Life is such an immensity of glorious possibilities," murmured Yetta. "Not mine, in itself. That can only be the choice between bleak duty or bright egotism. I must teach school, or marry money—that's all. Any one can oversee that. But Lis has come into it, from the first—isn't that astonishing?—in this dull village;—he may be everything, he may be nothing, but life is so overwhelmingly interesting, it makes one weep." And, indeed, she began to cry.

The Dominé took his hand from her eyes: it dropped beside her.

"You cannot understand because you are a saint," sobbed Yetta. "And to saints life is interesting from the inside."

"Then Lis is a saint, for he is satisfied."

She started up. "That is just what I must save him from! At once! Oh, I'm in such a hurry!"

"He'll refuse, Yetta, as long——"

"As his father keeps him back. I know."

"Child, there is one thing that is stronger than all our plans for life, and that is life itself." The Dominé's wandering eyes rested on the Plato: he smiled sadly. "We all find that out some day. And in that day the less plan we have for ourselves, the less cause we have for regret."

"Father, that is an old man's view." She wounded him in her intended kindness. "Your life is thought," she hastened to add. "Mine couldn't be. You can live yours fully between these four walls. You don't wish to—jump over them. Why should you?"

"Four walls may be a p—prison," said the Dominé aloud, to himself. "And they may be a refuge. True."

"If I could put a thousand guilders here, now, in this dear, thin hand of yours, what would you do with them?"

"I? A thousand guilders? My dear child!" cried the Dominé, frightened. "I couldn't think of keeping so much money in the house over-night!"

"I haven't got it, father, but what would you do with it, if we had?"

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"I should not give it away," said the Dominé thoughtfully. "No, I should put it in a bank, and probably the bank I selected would fail. I am glad I haven't got it. Don't give it me!" The Dominé turned his head to and fro, as if looking for thieves in the dusk.

"I shall not, father—not till you let me. And the boys will make their way better without it. Theirs will be just humdrum, common-place prosperities like——"

"Mine?" he suggested.

"Mother's." She hid her face altogether on his shoulder, in the folds of the gown. "Yours is the prosperity of the New Testament, the life eternal begun here below: I don't know about that."

In his lingering kiss upon her neck she felt, unfathomed, the overflowing prayer of his silent reply.

ON this earth our visits to Abraham's Bosom—even those of the most favoured amongst us—must be few and brief: we cross the Great Gulf. The Bosom, therefore, cannot be the right one, after all.

Yetta Donderbus hardly minded where she was, outside the study, as long as she managed to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with her mother, such as the Parsoness neither avoided nor sought. When the latter lady, therefore, looking up, over spectacles, from accounts in *her* sanctum (the Square Closet) demanded: "Yetta, will you stop here and sew or will you take the currant-juice to Doris?" Yetta promptly responded that she would at once take the currant-juice. She only realised half-way across the street, that she had resolved not on any account in her present state of mind to seek contact with Lis's father.

"Well, I haven't sought it," she reflected, pushing her way in. She looked round the darkened, dull little room. A whole existence in eighteen foot square!

"How now! Where is Lis?"

"Out with the cart," replied the sick man, querulously. "He said he couldn't do any more painting these days, so he sent away the hired boy. I don't understand. The painting isn't finished. And I'm alone."

Yetta moved about the room, putting things to rights, for she was neat-handed. The invalid complained gently, as she worked. "Thank Mevrouw Dominé for the currant-juice," he said. "It's very sour. Mine was better in the days when I had the dépôt. I had to give it up because the man wouldn't make his bottles full size. The Lord shouldn't

have made cheating so easy, Yetta: it's rough on those as daren't do it." He tried to shift a lame leg. "Solomon says the way of transgressors is hard, but Solomon didn't know—naturally, being a King—about the grocery line. Lord forgive me, if it's wrong," grumbled Simeon Doris. "As, in course, it must be. An inspired King'd know more about groceries even than I do, so I don't understand." He shook his head wearily: he was glad he could still shake his head, and lift one arm.

"Hard, in the end, I suppose," comforted Yetta. He tried to look her way.

"The end?" he repeated. "When they're dead, you mean? It don't matter then, if they're elect."

"That's your religion: I don't understand about that," answered Yetta, with a vigorous shake of the duster she had taken up.

"You needn't understand, if you're elect," argued Simeon. "And, if you aren't, what's the use of your understanding? That's what I always tell Lis, *now*. Don't worry. I worried all my life: it was worrying made me like this. And what was the good? In the end it comes without worrying"—he closed his eyes, leaning back—"if it comes."

Yetta turned on him. "Are you elect? You?"

"Hist, girl. That is too holy a subject to be spoken of thus." For a moment he lay mumbling to himself, and she dusted. Suddenly he screamed out: "Catch it! Kill it! There it is!"

"What?" she asked, astonished.

"The blue-bottle! The accursed blue-bottle. It's been tormenting me all the afternoon. There it crawls. Quick!"

Yetta looked down at the huge insect, momentarily still. "I don't like to," she objected. "I never killed anything in my life."

"Lis kills them. Oh, Yetta, no one can conceive, till he's lame, the agony of one crawling fly!"

"God's creatures——" began Yetta, hesitatingly, clutching her duster.

"Flies aren't God's creatures! I used to believe so, and oh, how I suffered, to think God sent such devils, in my pain to torment me! Oh, how much we suffer, Yetta, and no good to any one. Kill it! It'll begin to buzz again in a minute, and it'll creep on my face, when you're gone! 'Twas your father—God bless him!—told me Baalzebub meant the King of Flies in Bible language. It's devils from hell they are, not God's creatures—the Bible says so. And they 'zebubbed' in old Canaan, says your father: he does it so, you'd think he was a fly." The insulted creature, a winter remnant, rose in air, filling the small room with its noise. The sick man's voice dropped into a whine. The blue-bottle settled on the window-curtain. In the grateful stillness the contrite Yetta, conquering a life-long repulsion, climbed upon a chair, laboriously chased and shudderingly squashed the tormentor. She got down, queasy but triumphant, and flung the duster away.

"Thank you, Yetta. You do things for others," said the sick man humbly. She began smoothing his pillow and arranging his rug. "A woman's hand is a woman's hand, after all," he whispered.

She protested. "Lis does his best: and he kills your flies as well."

"More than his best," he made answer, referring to supernatural assistance, "but—it's hard on the boy."

She set down the glass she was filling, set it down with so violent a jerk that she splashed its contents over the Missionary report.

"Oh, your mother's——" exclaimed Simeon, but she did not hear him.

"Yes, it's hard on the boy. Yes, it's hard on the boy. Have you any conception, how hard it is?" Her voice, her whole frame, trembled, with excitement. She poured out, on his consternation, the torrent of her headlong reproach. "The boy!" she cried. "The boy will not complain! His youth passes—let it pass! His hopes slumber—let them sleep! His chances vanish—let them go! The

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boy! What else should he ask? What more may he claim? He's a grocer—is he a very 'cute grocer? He's a nurse, is he a tolerable nurse?" She paused one moment for breath. He would have spoken, but she hurried on. "No, he's not a particularly 'cute grocer: he's too honest, as you were! He doesn't adulterate: for him the way of transgressors is too hard! And he isn't a particularly good nurse, for he cares too much. And he doesn't do as the doctor says he ought to do, because you cry out, when it hurts! All the same he does his daily best every day, all day. He makes your bed and he catches your flies! And you—you—you are content it should go on and on, for ever!" The tears were in her throat, in her voice: she fought them down.

"Not for ever! When I am dead——"

"When you are dead, what then?"

"He can do what he likes. But what else can he do? We are too poor to pay for a nurse. He will still be a grocer. I've only the business. He wanted to be a house-painter, but——"

"Fool, that you are," she cried, exasperated. "Have you lived with him seventeen years and not seen that he isn't like the clodhoppers here! Is he *your* child, Simeon Doris? What was his mother like? Was it she who gave him his sixth sense?"

"His mother was a good, mild woman," replied the affrighted grocer, "but she had all her five senses about her, neither more nor less. And why you should break in here and be so rude about my son——"

"You have forced me to speak, somehow; I am glad it has come," replied Yetta, more calmly. "You know that I have always meant well by Lis."

"I know, and I am grateful to you. 'Tis an evil world, Yetta; I am old now, and ill, and outside it. You have been good to me, and so has Dr. Slik, and your father, and Lis. That's four of you, and I'm grateful. I can't love my neighbour, that's always tried to overreach me,

while I daren't do likewise to him. God'll forgive my not loving, seeing it has come because of Him. But don't you go back on me. What do you want me to do about Lis ? "

She sat down beside him.

" I want you to let him leave this place and go study for a painter—an artist. The money will be found."

" And I ? " cried the sick man.

" You can be made much more comfortable in a Home in the place where he works."

" A painter ? He paints here. He doesn't wish to go learn."

" He will never wish, till you wish—try him ! He can live to be a great artist, possibly, a Rembrandt—you can understand that ?—rich, famous, immortal ! If so, he must begin to work now. You can keep him back, you alone, you his father ; you can tie him down to life-long drudgery, here, in this hole ! " Again she had leaped to her feet.

" Rich ? " he repeated, staring into her eyes.

" Rich beyond anything you dream of ! Ten times as rich, if he succeeds, as Pareys ! "

" He used to talk," said the sick man, musingly, " of carriages, and villas, and horses."

" He has a right to them. He claimed them as a child. He can have them as a man ! "

" Rich ! " said Simeon Doris.

" The money is waiting ! " she cried, following up her cue. " He can have it, but he must earn it. God gives some men gold in their fingers, their eyes, their souls. And to some men he doesn't give it. They die poor, like my father, like you."

" Rich ! " said Doris.

" Ask him, whether he has it in him or not—the gold ! " she said. " And if he says no, I will come here and beg your pardon on my knees."

XVI

WHEN Lis toiled home that night his father asked him nothing, not even the customary questions about sales. The young man knew how to meet with sympathetic silence these long moods of melancholy thought. There was truth in Simeon's repeated murmur, that now, towards the close of his wearisome, worrisome struggle, he was grown too weary to worry. But he was not too weary to suffer—who is?—nor too weary to grieve. More and more did he see life as a mess, the world as a slough. Over that slough lay a thin sheet of ice, across which the wicked skated lightly on silver skates, whilst the lumbering righteous fell through. But what matters a mud bath or a prosperous journey? All that passes. The end only is permanent. And the end is hap-hazard grace.

"Are you in pain, father?"

"No, boy." The periods of pain were as casual as the periods of depression. Occasionally Simeon heroically ignored them: occasionally he superfluously complained. He was utterly sick of the slow world and its old sorrows, sick of his own interminable suffering, of the restless mysteries he no longer cared to solve. From the bottom of his heart he pitied the kindly Dominé, a philosopher! building up with soft arguments on a shifty foundation the whole higgledy-piggledy mass of divinely ordered Weal.

"Don't think so much, father," ventured Lis again—an hour later. "You won't sleep." The invalid smiled.

"She's killed the blue-bottle," he said.

"Who? Not Yetta?"

"Yes. She didn't like doing it, but she did it for me."

"She does things she doesn't like, when she needn't," answered Lis. He was mixing his father's night-drink, the egg a costly present from the Parsoness. His words seemed high praise to him.

"Lis, can you find me the old newspaper—last week's—with the bit you read out to me about that picture?"

"I'll try, father, as soon as I've finished this."

Lis unearthed the rag, after vain searchings elsewhere, from the dust-heap outside. The December night watched, cold and cloudy, with bleak gusts, over the little huddle of houses. Inside, the room was stuffy, with the heat of paraffin lamp and stove.

Lis read again a stale paragraph about the finding of a genuine (?) Rembrandt in a garret, a picture sold for a hundred guilders, cleaned, sold for twenty thousand, and so on.

"Rembrandt!" repeated the sick man very carefully. "He's dead!"

"Yes, father." The scrap of soiled paper had dropped from Lis's hands.

"The man who paid only a hundred guilders thought he was alive?"

Lis sighed. "Perhaps. But Rembrandt was a very great painter, father." The lad's voice caressed, in unconscious reverence, the wondrous name.

"Was he? It must be much easier to be a great artist than to be a good grocer, Lis. You aren't a good grocer—you haven't the *smell*—and everybody says you paint quite nicely."

"Everybody?"

"All the Elders say the clouds in Church are all bulgy and thick, like cotton-wool. And Mynheer Pareys told the Dominé they were good. A hundred guilders is a lot of money, Lis. Could Rembrandt paint much better than you, Lis, before he died? I mean, did people think so?"

"I—I can't paint a bit! I can't paint as well as Pareys. I never learnt."

"But if you learnt," continued the invalid anxiously, "you could paint better?"

"Better than Pareys!" exclaimed Lis, agitated, in spite of himself, by his father's persistence. "If I learnt? Yes, I think, perhaps, I might. I think so, because, you see, he doesn't take any pains. He walks about and talks and laughs, in between. And I *do* go on, like mad, father, trying my best. Don't let's talk of it. I don't want to learn." He moved the lamp away and began drawing the bed-curtains. "Father, it's past twelve: you must stop talking and get to sleep."

"No, Lis!" The invalid made the one movement still possible to his left arm. "I don't want to sleep yet: I want to talk. I can always take a tabloid presently. I want to talk to you. I want more light, Lis, for what I'm going to say!"

"I'll put the lamp——"

"Go into the shop, Lis, and get a packet of candles, the short fat ones, the ones the rich summer-flies buy!" Lis obeyed, wondering.

"Put them into your grandfather's brass candlesticks and light them all."

"All—father?"

"All. I can waste money for once in my life, before I die."

"You're not going to die. You're rather better." Lis stopped.

"No, it was only my way of speaking. All the same, 'twere the best thing that could happen for you and me."

Lis was busy with the candles. "Father, you say things that cut me to the heart."

"I don't mean to, Lis. But I've often noticed how weary you are. Hush, I know that you hide it. You can't hide looking pale. Boys of your age oughtn't to wake of nights. There won't be any fly to-night, Lis. She's killed it. Are all the candles lighted? What a glare they make! No, don't move them. I like it. I want you to go back to the shop, Lis, and take down those two texts and bring them here!" Again Lis obeyed, wondering yet more. The sick man took the cards on his coverlet and with infinite exertion,

motioning away the offered help of his boy, he slowly succeeded in tearing first the one, then the other, across. He lay back, exhausted.

"That's done," he said. "They've hung there nigh on twenty years. And they've beggared us both."

Lis wisely waited. His thoughts had fled to his dead mother, and stopped.

"I don't think she'd mind," said the sick man. "I don't mean the words aren't true. All the Bible's true—it must be—but it don't come right in this life. Lis, how that used to worry me! There was Jacob now, so successful, such a cheat! Oh, Lis, what a general store-dealer Jacob would have made! I don't worry about it any more now. I'm going to Heaven anyway. I'm one of the elect."

"Who would be if you wasn't, father?"

"Oh, Lis, you know it isn't that, but you *won't* understand."

"No," said Lis gently. "I won't."

Simeon sighed heavily. "If only I could be sure about you, I should die content. But it's no use: we must all bide the Lord's time."

"Oh, I shall be all right," said Lis cheerfully.

"I've been honest all my life, Lis—what poverty it has been! I'm not more of a fool than others—than Jansen of Aldervank—I'm not judging him, but I know! I won't have you struggle as I did. If you've got to be a grocer, Lis, tear down those texts!" He drew breath.

"Put the candles up high! I want light. Often I've pondered it. I thought you had to be: I didn't see, how you could be anything else: how could you? Is it true that there's money in painting—money for *you*? Mynheer Pareys is rich: therefore he can paint. Not you! Lis, is there money in painting? Is it possible? Is there money for you?"

"No," cried Lis. "No. No. No. Not for me! No, father, not for me!"

A cruel silence fell upon them, a living weight in the

red-hot glare of the little room. All the familiar paltry objects stood out in the unwonted brilliance—the half forgotten pale portrait on the wall, of the dead mother, dumb witness of a life-long devotion—

"It's a lie! You lie to me!" rang out the fierce voice of the father. "Let me see your face! Ah, the light: you can't hide it! There's all love in the lie, but you lie!"

Lis sank down by the bed and hid his face.

"I can't lift it, but I needn't," said his father quite softly. "Oh fool, fool—what a fool I've been! You believe in yourself: you've known all along. You can paint and grow rich, Lis, like Rembrandt. You needn't be a pauper grocer, like me!" His eyes filled, as his voice, with sudden tears.

"I didn't know, Lis," he tried to reach his son's hand with his worn fingers. "You must forgive me: I didn't know. I didn't know about painting and money. I've never known about life till it was too late. But it isn't too late now. We must hurry." Again he lay silent, listening to the clock.

He was thinking that he couldn't go to a hospital, no, he couldn't leave this wretched little home of all his life in Boldam. How selfish he was! The very thought of going made his heart stand still. He was thinking, how much lighter, how much gentler his long struggle could have been, had he known, at the start, that he was one of the elect. He was thinking that Lis had received money for drawing-lessons, and had had no drawing-lessons, but bought an electrical machine. He was thinking of the probable earthly future, as dimly foreshadowed, the hopeless increase of his horrible complaint. He might live a dozen years longer, growing impotent, imbecile, blind, deaf, dumb.

Lis also, sitting by the table, heard the clock tick. Thus life passes. And what do we know of the next?

"Give me a tabloid, and put the bottle on the bed where I can reach it, Lis. Dr. Slik says I may have two. If I don't take them soon after each other, the first loses its effect. And

I must sleep to-night. I'm so tired. Life's so long. Blow out the candles: I've seen what I wanted to see. And sit away yonder by the night-light, Lis, and read me to sleep with the story of Jacob. Read all about him and Isaac. And how he cheated Laban. I shall be asleep before you get to the end. Good-bye. Good-night, Lis. Don't mind me. Whatever happens, I'm safe. And you stick to the Promise, Lis!"

In the sudden change to twilight darkness Lis read, from the far corner arm-chair, the story of Jacob's deceits. Before it was completed he paused to hearken to the sick man's breathing. Yes, father had fallen asleep over that strange story of divinely favoured fraud. Dead-tired with manifold emotions, the lad dropped his head upon the open volume and passed into a dreamland of artist fruition and fame.

When he awoke much later—still in the long gloom of that winter night—the breathing had stopped. Vaguely opprest, he crept forward, shading the shaded lamp. There was not a sound. The first thing he saw was the bottle empty on the floor. Thank God, a few scattered tabloids on the coverlet. He didn't stop to count them. He didn't need to count them. He couldn't realise what had happened. He didn't understand why it should happen. He had never seen death. He knew nothing of death. Except that his father was dead.

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SECOND :

XVII

LIS DORIS came riding through the summer midday heat. The sun—

Hush, it is five years ago—is it really five years, or four?—since he stood, in the chill grey morning. To this day he doesn't know what happened, isn't sure. Dr. Slik says a blood-vessel broke, on the brain. The local doctor speaks of a clot, but till Yetta came, he seemed hesitating what to call the immediate cause of death. Nobody can say with certainty how many tabloids the sick man took. It was no use Lis worrying to remember the number that had been left in the bottle last time. He worried till he turned sick. No, it was no use: and presently he abandoned the search. Who shall tell, besides, whether some had not rolled between the planks or under the bed? They were so small, and, like much of modern medicine, so deadly. Most of us die now-a-days, poisoned by our doctors, our neighbours, or ourselves.

When they left him alone with his dead, he sat himself down, in the heavy light, to draw, with what power he possessed, the numb face. He worked on, as he saw it, through his haze of tears. He put the drawing, when finished, in a cupboard—ten days later he had to take it out again and pack it at the bottom of his trunk.

It was a Notary from Arnhem who wrote to him about the sale of the house and garden, and the business—every-

thing he possessed, in fact, from the pigs in the sty to the pots in the shop. He heard with amazement that the whole little property was worth, to the Notary, about five thousand guilders. He ran to the Dominé, carefully avoiding Yetta, with the Notary's note.

The Dominé had just received three hundred guilders from the publisher for his Commentary on Job, which had taken him half a life-time, and the sum had seemed to him surprisingly large for an intellectual achievement. He was therefore exactly in the right mood to estimate material acquisitions, such as houses and lands, at an exorbitant value and his utter ignorance of prices was an unquestionable help. "My dear boy, why not?" said the Dominé, and he laid down with a pained sigh the anonymous letter (postmark Boldam) which had just informed him that he was certain of hell for having printed that Job was not written in Dutch. "My dear boy, why not? Land is always valuable, and yours is quite a largish piece. Why, I have heard of land which was worth five thousand guilders the square foot, or was it yard? And yours must be quite a number of feet: do you know how m-many?"

"No," said Lis, "but I could find out."

"And it is in the middle of the village. Boldam is small, but at any moment it may grow bigger. I hope not"—again the Dominé sighed: that bad habit, said his daughter, was growing upon him—"P-property increases wonderfully in value now-a-days, I am told. L-landed property. The most glorious poem ever written was sold for less, I am ashamed to say, than my—ah, well,"—the Dominé blushed, and coughed.

"Then you think it's all right?" asked Lis anxiously. "There's no mistake? He knows what he's doing?"

"My dear Lis!" the Dominé smiled with an expression most unusual in him, superciliousness. "Business relations between the butcher and the lamb are rarely to the advantage of the latter."

"He includes all the furniture," said Lis.

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"I should advise you to accept his offer. Of course with the exclusion of a few k-keepsakes."

"Mother's picture and grandfather's candlesticks."

"Of course, and such like—these you can ask Clasine to store in our garret. I understand you wish to make a new departure. Trust me, in that case the old impedimenta—you know what impedimenta are, Lis?"

"No, sir," replied Lis, too courteous to confess that he had heard his father declare the Dominé (Dusty) had impedimenta in his speech.

The pastor gazed at the youth with friendly apprehension. "Dear, dear, you are very rural," he said, "to go out into the world alone!"

"If I have these five thousand guilders, Dominé, I can go and study painting for at least five years in Amsterdam and elsewhere. I know that: I've inquired. Before. The s. m seems enormous. Father can never have guessed——"

"It's a large sum to spend as income," interrupted the Dominé sagely. "But not so much to possess as capital." The Dominé nodded his head: he was beginning to feel like the manager of a bank. "Have a cigar, Lis. They are not as good as those of Mynheer P-Pareys."

"Thank you, Dominé," said Lis and took one. "They taste better."

Thereupon the Dominé patriarchally blessed him, with the fragrant smoke around them, by Abraham's Bosom, in the ageless grey dressing-gown. "You are going to look for the Muses," said the Dominé, smiling. "God go with you! Then you will find them in the Christian Heaven." He sat gazing for several moments into the fire-light: he added softly: "An occasional excursion into classical fields is exceedingly p-pleasant. If only we don't lie down in them, Lis."

During the student life which now soon opened out around him on all sides, like a circular labyrinth, Lis Doris recalled with increasing understanding these at first incomprehensible words. The change, at seventeen, from the tiny home to the loud city was a shock, an upset, call it a somersault.

The first railway, the first hotel, the first concourse of human beings! Far more startling, and terrifying, and lastingly impressive than these, the first picture! The drawing-master in whose house he dwelt (for wisely, having so much more to learn than art, he crept into a family), the drawing-master took him on a quiet day to the Old Museum and led him straight to the picture of the "Clothmakers" and—for this master was a wise and good man—left him there alone.

"Join me in five minutes," said the master. "I shall be in the next room." But when ten had passed, the man, with a good-natured laugh, went back to look for him, and touched his shoulder. Lis started, turning a scared face to his companion.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Don't laugh at me, please. You see, I never saw a picture before."

"Shall we pass on to the others?" questioned the teacher.

"Just as you choose."

"No, I am going to be very kind to you, Doris. I am going to take you straight home. To-morrow, if you like, we can come back and look at a lot."

There are other pictures as great in that marvellous collection: there are many less great, yet too great for mortal touch. During several weeks Lis was unable to put pencil to paper.

"What you deem to be humility," said the master at last, "is really excess of pride. Did you expect to be a Rembrandt?"

"Thanks!" exclaimed the lad: with a light in his eyes he snatched at a piece of paper and began sketching the master's cat. The sketch was a failure. There is no animal more difficult to draw than a cat.

In most other communities his freshman's existence would have been made a hell upon earth to the Boldam boor. Amongst artists things are notably not so. Many of the students were themselves not of the rank which delightedly rags a young innocent to despair. In a rough and very ready manner they helped to lick him into shape. The whole

of Amsterdam licked, intentionally or not, as hard as it could. He knew that he wanted a lot of licking: he mutely appealed to it to lick. After a certain time he found himself going alone to a theatre, if he couldn't gain the company of a friend. He even went alone—a thing so few men ever learn to do—into a shop.

He made new friends, a good many, from the very novelty of all surroundings, and that was a satisfactory development, firstly, because, in spite of his long isolation on the heath, he liked friends, but more especially because the great friendship of the past, which had sufficed, dropped away from him. Yetta, after her marriage, went honey-mooning—so she called it—for a couple of years in the Levant. The Dominé, to Lis's exceeding chagrin, did not invite the lad to Boldam. And suddenly, after the first wistful wait, Lis felt that he could not go back there. His holidays he spent in other, picturesque, places with a party. Whatever he did, he couldn't go to a hired room in Boldam. The old grocery shop, for which the Arnheim Notary had paid five thousand guilders, had been let to the former dairy-maid at the Holst, who lived in it, with a babe of her own. It was said that she prospered. To Yetta Lis of course wrote eagerly of all his experiences, his prospects and plans. In reply she sent him bright little travelling epistles: they never contained any allusion to her husband beyond perfunctory remembrances and regards. Not even, when some small award found its way into the papers. Lis shrugged his shoulders. He knew that Pareys never read the papers: it was one of the man's small jokes to let the news—foreign, for instance—filter through Job. The awards Lis kept out of his letters, writing only: I have done well. He would certainly not have felt too proud to accept assistance from Yetta Donderbus, but he was glad that he had been able to tell her, before her marriage, of the offer which rendered him independent. "Ah!" said Yetta. "Five thousand guilders? I am so glad. Father says he is sure it is worth it? You can trust father, Lis, entirely. Yes, I have

heard the Notary's name in Arnhem. He has an excellent reputation, I believe."

She gazed out at the window, yet it seemed as if she were reading his thoughts. Presently she turned to look full at him and said clearly: "No, it will make no difference in my plans. No difference at all." And yet a moment later she laughed, gladly, the laugh that made sunshine in a Dutch December room.

When she came back from the Levant, she went to Paris. For a moment Lis thought, one bright Whitsuntide, of visiting her there. But she did not press her rather mildly responsive invitation. Nor did she write that she actually regretted his negative resolve.

He wrote to Paris from Düsseldorf, where he was studying landscape, under the influence of good workers, such as the Achenbachs: afterwards he went on to Munich for a bit, and sat at the feet of one who has learnt much from the old Dutchmen: Lenbach. But he soon reverted to Holland—the heath. He was too little cosmopolitan for promiscuous painting, international art-life, too much a son of the soil. After a brief period of triumphant clap-trap he came back to the humiliating confession that he couldn't talk æstheticism. The Masters, it is true, were not good hands at it, but the disciples, with whom alone you mingled, for the most part allowed of few other relaxations. The cult of a cult touched no nerve-centre in Lis. He cut his hair, tried to learn German, and still paused before a good picture, whenever painted, or by whom. His surroundings remained modest: his means slender.

The habit of poverty was easy to him, but he couldn't be stingy in his bargains, and he couldn't say "No" to a friend. Also, he was young, and in the bright exuberance of student life he made ducks and drakes, once or twice, of sums that would have seemed a fortune to the buried grocer. Simeon had said truly that his son had not the dealer's mind. Nor had he that of the Church Elder. He retains delightful, foolish memories of nights on the moonlit Rhine,

and of melancholy mornings that look delightful now. It seems only yesterday that young Hungarian burst upon Lis's sleep at Munich, and said he must either shoot himself or find a hundred thalers on the spot. The spot was Lis's garret. Most expensive of all, however—more expensive than blue eyes and moonlit evenings—was the big, overburdened household of the first drawing-master in Amsterdam. The wife was worn out and required sea air (no wonder): all the children were variously indisposed and wanted more than they could get. Lis sometimes wished with a sigh that he had dropped into a less needy art-family than the Loksters. Pallid Mevrouw Lokster, if he approached her, complained to him lengthily, with much dreaded final tears. Meagre Mynheer Lokster pressed his hand, after long silence, with a worse dreaded sigh. The five white children were always hungry. It is therefore evident that they could have no treats but such as Lis provided. On his return to Amsterdam from abroad he was firmly resolved not to go and live with them again. He would take a room without board, amongst other young men, and be free. He said this to himself on the doorstep, after ringing the bell. He spent two, three hours of pure delight with them, talking "shop" about the painters he had met, the pictures he had seen, the ups and downs, the ins and outs, of all the wondrous art-world. It is a world within itself, internationally involved, entirely unconscious of any life outside. The Loksters were steeped in its essence, from the oldest to the youngest, their grave minds turned towards Art, as black sunflowers to the sun. The smallest child stopped crying at sight of a fine print: the whole lot of them forgot all privations in a moment, full of cheerful squabble over the merits of some new name. Yes, after all, they were splendid company for an artist. He took the whole family, including the sick mother, to the Circus that night. At one in the morning Mynheer Lokster pressed his hand, after a long silence, which had followed on much talk. Mynheer Lokster sighed. "The punch was good, was it not, Lis?" he said.

Lis nodded; his heart was 'oo full for words. He would much have preferred a glass of claret. "Yes," said Lokster. "My wife knows how to make things comfortable. If only she has the means!" So Lis stayed.

Five thousand guilders is an enormous sum of money: some people believe the sum to contain far more than five thousand several pieces of one guilder. It is impossible, for the reasonable, to conclude with certainty, in how far these people may be right.

Lis was not a financier, but he was also not such a fool as not to see the bottom of his purse till the last piece was taken out of it. His affairs were as involved as the last sentence. Small debts, bigger loans, a surety for Peter Paul Lokster (the eldest son, who drew for some pottery works, and had stolen—oh, week of agony!—a design). "It's the last hundred I can give you," Lis said heroically to Mevrouw Lokster—but really, you had to, you know, because it was for the baker's bill, and the long-suffering baker had stopped the bread! "I've only a few hundreds left," said Lis.

"Why not try to sell some of your work?" advised Mevrouw Lokster.

"Well, of course, that's what one's always worked for. But it doesn't seem thinkable, all the same!"

"You are too modest, Mynheer Doris. The poorest pictures sell best."

Lis laughed. "You might have put that differently," he said.

"Wasn't I polite? I only meant yours might sell also."

Lis put a couple of German landscapes into the Art Society Show, rather in the elder Achenbach's manner, objective, a bit hard. Mynheer Lokster priced them. Too high, even after Lis had beaten him down. They attracted the cruel notice: "clever, but lacking in originality." Yet they were sold, very soon, to a dealer. When asked for whom he had bought them, the dealer curtly answered: "Myself." A smile ran round the little artist *coterie*: all the same (art is so uncertain) people looked at the work again. "Lis Doris,"—a new name! "Sold?"

XVIII

A FEW weeks after the sale of the pictures Lis went to paint silvery sand-dunes near Haarlem. He settled down at the village of Sandpoort, quiescent in thoughts of sale and payment: pecuniary peace. The Loksters were happy in Amsterdam: their lodger was at rest by the sea. He painted, with a softness which he himself felt to be a success, the silvery green grasses against the silvery grey slopes. He needed concentration. On Lokster's advice he had resolved to enter for the great biennial competition, known as the Feydor Bequest: two years' study in Italy or Paris and a Gold Medal First Prize. For the subject this time was landscape, preferably sand-dunes or heath.

On a summer evening—his day's work well over—he sat with his pipe and a pot of beer outside the white cottage among the white hillocks in which he dwelt. The wide scene had been bleached by the fell midday heat: now it was sinking to repose in great shadows of grey over grey. Lis Doris had engaged in brief, laughing talk with his landlord's pretty daughter—the Parsoness of Boldam would have called the girl away. But the Parsoness of Boldam had never heard her husband's bright jests in the days of his student life at Leyden. Lis Doris took a long draught of beer: his thoughts were of "home": his heart was full of solitude. Emptiness, more than anything, can fill to bursting these hearts of ours.

"Home" was still home, in spite of change and loss: in fact, the place had come nearer to his heart again than during this five years' absence. For Yetta was at Aldervank.

She was there under circumstances that, little more than

five years ago, would have seemed to him too wild for a dream. That spring, the old Lord of Aldervank, a bachelor who lived in the Hague, had been gathered to a goodly company of ancestors: the deserted Manor House had been purchased by Pareys. They were there now: she had written to say so, but with little description. She manifestly avoided in her letters all details of her probable luxury, in Paris or elsewhere. She wished to remain to him the same girl he had always known, just Yetta, who liked him and was interested in all he could tell her—just Yetta, *bon camarade*.

Up to a point she had succeeded. He remembered her as he had seen her last, at her wedding, when he went to the vestry, in his deep mourning, to wish her happiness. He had come over on purpose to do so, from his novel work in Amsterdam. Till he departed thither she had seemed to avoid him. Even the little talk about the Arnhem Notary he had wrested from her. And now, during all these years, there had only been the tranquil affection of a long-drawn gratitude. Absence does not make the heart grow fonder, unless it is more than fond to begin with. Lis had asked once or twice for a photograph, but Yetta had not responded. He remained indifferent, for he felt an intense abhorrence of photographs, which never reproduce a face.

He was musing, then, on Yetta, as he knew her, now Mistress of Aldervank Manor House, when the postman—a rural postman, toiling, grey-haired and bent, through the twilight—brought the letter which invited him.

"My husband and I" (that was satisfactory) "would be so pleased, if you could manage to come and see us. What would you say to Saturday? Then you could hear the dear old father preach!"

Lis looked at the date and the postmarks. To-morrow was Saturday. Mevrouw Lokster had let the letter lie about for a day or two. To-morrow was Saturday: he must telegraph. His pulse flared up a bit: palpitations were neither of his age nor of his temper.

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Still, he didn't sleep as happily as usual that night. Five years is a long time to go back over, to all one's so much longer youth! He was glad when he could fling his clothes together and start, very early. His telegram he left in the pretty cottage girl's hand: she watched him down the road.

Small as the kingdom of the Netherlands may be, it takes a long time to get from Sandpoort in North Holland to Boldam in Overijssel. The sun was high at noon, when he left the train at the nearest station, Hoogst. He had five miles of blazing heath before him. There was no conveyance waiting of any kind. The place—Hoogst—is a hamlet of half a dozen houses, flung by chance near the railway line. "You might hire a waggon," said the sole man in charge.

From a neighbouring farmer, however, Lis got a steed he could sit. An old artillery horse, half broken down. So he rode off, across the purple glow of the heather, under the red-hot sky. He rode softly and thoughtfully—not too sure an equestrian—straining his eyes for the first sight, over the straight horizon, of his native village spire.

Boldam lies between Hoogst and Aldervank. He could hardly do otherwise than pass the village: he need not have passed the shop. But he did, and drew rein before it, and irresistibly driven by his ill-fortune, he entered at the tinkly door.

"What can I serve you with?" said the woman of the shop, coming forward. She came through the glass door, too quickly: it banged behind her. Time had dealt unkindly with the big, red dairy-maid. Time had altered nothing in the shop.

"La!" said the maid, "Lis Doris!" Her blue eyes opened admiringly. Whatever work of time the dairy-maid remarked at this moment, it was evident she heartily approved of it. "La!" she said again.

"Good morning, Maria," was all Lis could think of. He said it awkwardly. His eyes wandered, taking stock.

And he noted that even the two texts were there again, in their old places, twice the size of those his father had destroyed at the end.

"Why, where do you come from?" asked Maria. She slapped her apron with her big red hands.

"Not from far," said Lis curtly, detesting the woman, and her loud voice, and her loud slaps, in that place!

"From Aldervank? Is that your horse? What doings, eh? Who would have thought it? Well, well, we haven't all the same chances! La!"

Lis looked towards the glass door. He fancied he heard a sound of low moaning.

"She's fallen with her nose into fat, as they say!" continued Maria, moving things unnecessarily on the counter. "Some of us get the cow's tongue in life, and some get her teeth." The moan rose to a squeal: the woman ran back: there was a sound of blows, abuse, and crying. She returned, unruffled, and seeing her visitor remained so taciturn, she laughed, with a toss of her head:

"Well, when you've done looking round, you must say what you've come to buy."

"I'll buy those two texts," he blurted out, "if you'll promise me not to put up others."

She stared at him open-mouthed. "Why, *you* always had them!" she exclaimed. And shamelessly added, "Job Boonbakker told me."

"That's why," he said quickly. "*We* had them. Father meant them. Do you?"

She flashed an angry look at him. "I daresay I mean them as much as your father did. They pay."

He shrugged his shoulders. He felt the impossibility of treating religion religiously, or of touching any sensitive chord delicately, in his own heart or hers, with such a woman as this. He was sorry he had entered: he would never come again.

"I should like," he said, quite timidly, "to—to have just one look inside."

"By all means—why not?" she threw open the door. "You're such a swell now: it's still good enough for the likes of poor me!"

"I am not in any way a swell," he said, passing her, "I am on my way to Aldervank. I haven't been asked before."

She followed him grumbling. "All the same, you're not a poor wronged woman, that has to make a living for herself and her charge out of a miserable little shop you escaped from, the moment your father gave you a chance."

He wasn't listening, though he heard more than he wished. His whole soul was intent on the little room in front of him, just as he had left it, only a bit smaller; the same wall-paper, window-curtains, furniture—and yet the indefinable change of personality, a different grouping, loud engravings instead of texts on the walls, some garish paper roses, a rag quilt on the old bed.

The old bed. The bed his father died in. He stood beside it again. On it, half covered by the gaudy tatters, lay a little child of three or four. Perhaps older, too stunted and emaciated for a wiser judge than Lis to fix its age. The child was crying miserably, with the low note of exhaustion, the saddest cry of children's cries, that are the saddest cries on earth.

Lis looked at the woman, Maria. She saw reproach in his eyes, and flared up at it immediately. "Yes, that's the brat," she cried, "I wish it was dead."

"Your child?"

"My child. It isn't dead, but it ought to be. That's sense, I tell the Dominé. It oughtn't to have been born, says the Dominé. Well then, it ought to be dead, says I. But it has no such intentions; oh, dear no! It's going to live to be ninety, is Miss Mary Lariks. Yes, that's her name, exactly like mine: I'm Miss Mary Lariks too!"

"I understand," said Lis gently.

"Oh, you understand, do you?" she cried with concentrated spite, "I daresay you do. I imagine you men do

understand, and make your arrangements accordingly. You aren't troubled with appendages, Mister Lis Doris : you come back from your foreign escapades as free as you went to them ! And you find me sitting here, in this dull shop, with that brat."

"Hush," said Lis, "I meant, I understood your feelings. But you mustn't talk about the poor little thing's death in that way. People'd think you want to kill it !"

"They've no right to say that !" cried the woman violently. "They've no proof. I haven't insured it. The Dominé talked as you do. 'Have I insured it ?' I said. 'Answer me that !' He couldn't. I don't stand to win a penny by its death."

"She looks ill," said Lis. The child cried on, a puling cry. Perhaps, if she had known about looking ill and dying, she might have taken comfort.

"Oh yes, that's what they all say," answered the woman, still more angrily. "It's cheap pity, and then they go home. 'Give her eggs,' they say, 'and beef-tea. Strengthen her.' 'I can't afford it,' says I. 'Juffrouw Lariks, you ought to be ashamed of yourself !' "

Lis looked down at the little parchment-faced, puckered creature. It lifted its head on a peaked elbow. He thought of all the love and tenderness which had gathered round that bed.

"You're all right, aren't you ?" said Maria.

The child made no reply.

"I'm kind to yer, ain't I ?" persisted the woman.

"No," said the child.

The woman hit out at it, straight in the face.

Quick as a thought Lis snatched the child towards him, not quick enough, for what thought could have foreseen the mother's deed ? He turned to her, the child huddled in his arms.

"You brute !" he said. She laughed stupidly, and he noticed for the first time, that even at this hour she was probably slightly fuddled with drink. But, as he caught

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the child up, he had seen a thing that impressed him more painfully than this. The little body was covered with bruises, great blue and yellow bumps, and livid scars.

"You brute!" he said again: at least, there was some small pleasure in saying it. The child dropped its tired head against his cheek, and stupidly, shamefacedly, he kissed it.

"Ah, one can see you're a father!" grinned Maria.

"I'll tell you what I'll buy of you. I'll buy this wretched child," he said excitedly. "But you must let me have her cheap, as you don't want her," he added.

Maria screamed at the joke.

"I mean it. I am quite in earnest," he said, gathering courage and conviction as he went on, "I'll take the child away with me at once. Before you've killed it."

"Huh?" She hesitated a moment between apprehension and impudence.

He followed up his advantage. "Let me pass," he said haughtily, both arms round the bony little body. "Stand aside! I'll take the child along with me and shew her to the police!"

The final word was unfortunate. She poured out a torrent of abuse. Words incredible, words indescribable, the filthy vomit of a seething soul. The evil epithets jostled each other: once or twice he vainly tried to stop her. At last she paused, for breath.

"Medea!" he answered momentarily. She staggered back: silence fell between them. She stood staring, aghast.

He had loosened one arm, clumsily, trying to remember how he had held the youngest Lokstier, years ago. He wriggled a finger into a waistcoat pocket and jerked out a couple of bank-notes: they fell to the floor. There they lay, two yellow bank-notes: they impressed her more, filliped from a pocket like that, than any argument would have done. "Fifty guilders!" he said, "It's all I've brought with me. It's enough. I'm a poor man, but I'm willing to pay you thus much to take the child away." She gathered up the

money eagerly, as he went through the door. In the shop he paused, fearful of infantile dismay. "Will you come with me—a ride?" he questioned.

"Yes," said the quiet child.

So he rode along the village street of Boldam, with the strange child bunched up anyhow, against his breast.

XIX

SO he rode with the staring child in front of him, through the gates of Aldervank Manor House and up the avenue. He was not much distraught, but certainly ill at ease. He lacked of course that keen sense of the ridiculous which keeps a man of the world from committing a romantic action. He was taking the child to Yetta. She would comfort it, as she had comforted him. He would ask for her first: no one else would know of it. Immense was his faith in Yetta. And in no case could he have left a human creature to be beaten thus to death on that spot!

He turned a corner under spreading beech-trees. He had never been here before. Never, as a child, would he have dared to do more than peer, awed, through the locked gates, down the grass-grown drive. He expected to come to a closed door, ring and ask for Yetta.

He turned the corner, under spreading beech-trees. The place opened out suddenly, in a big gravelled square, with tubbed oranges. Behind these rose the house, one of those buildings which cry out to you from a distance the date of their birth. A dark-brown brick house with plenty of straight-lined white facings, whose delicate traceries of flowers and ribands, over many-paned windows, recalled in their simplicity of outline the pseudo-classic elegance of the age which unearthed Pompeii and transferred it to Versailles. By the large steps stood vases with bright flowers. Right and left the house was framed in tall chest-nuts, and under against the foliage to the right was a gaudy marquee with chairs in front of it, a huge parasol, a table with tea-things, dogs, bits of scattered colour gay on the

grass. The chairs were occupied: people were laughing and talking. The dogs got up and barked.

He would have backed, but this was already impossible. He drew rein, stood there for a moment, consciously absurd, despite his simplicity. Then Yetta came forward. He saw nothing but her.

"Lis!" she said, "Why didn't you telegraph? We thought you were away. Dear me, who is this?" she had put her hand on the mare's neck: it slid to his knee. He let the child sink down to her hold: she caught it. He bent low.

"Do you remember," he said, almost in a murmur, "how your father used to tell that you caught me, when I dropped from my dead mother's arms?"

"Yes," she said, holding the child, "but you were a baby!"

"And you a little child, not much bigger than this!"

So they met again: the others came up before they could say more. She set down the small girl, who clung to her, lolling against her skirts, a damp finger between damp lips.

"Is that you, Lis? By Jove, you are changed," said Pareys. "We had given up expecting you. Do you always travel in that style?"

Lis flushed, at finding again, thus immediately, the old, hated, tone of persiflage. He jumped down.

"Picturesque, is it not?" continued Odo, turning to one of his guests. "Let me introduce Mr. Lis Doris to the Baroness de Rossac."

"Bah—now a baroness!" thought Lis: he was miles away from any known surroundings. He bowed to a little black lady in muslin. The little lady remarked, in charming foreign Dutch:

"The damsel is diminutive, to have found so fine a knight."

"Have you forgotten my brother?" questioned Yetta impatiently. Of course, the stalwart, red-necked young

man in flannels was Ryk. Changed more than any of them by unsuccessful student life at Utrecht—unsuccessful from the professorial point of view. They moved to the table, a-glitter with silver and glass.

"I'm afraid lunch is over. They must get you something. Oh, that is your telegram now coming up the avenue. The office is seldom open here. You have grown so 'grossstädtisch'! You must be famished. Poor Lis!"

"There is more than I can eat here," laughed Lis, looking over the burdened table. He was always abstemious, as much from taste as from necessity.

"I'm afraid we do nothing but eat here," answered Yetta, talking fast. She gave the child at her skirts a cream-cake. "It is really the chief occupation, even on a hot day, in the country. I am not sure whether this is three o'clock coffee or four o'clock tea! The two mingle: take your choice."

"Have a drink?" proposed Ryk.

A dog crept from behind the long legs of Pareys, around which she had been cautiously prospecting, and licked Doris's pendant hand. "Jove, she knows you!" cried her master. "Lis, you know the Widow Chow?" Feeble, fat, the aged lady wagged her tail.

Lis observed that she wore a huge black bow. Her owner nodded across his cigarette. "Heavy mourning for her life companion! I like to see a widow in the family. And to know she isn't mine." He glanced at Yetta, a smileless glance. She was occupied, her eyes downcast, with the new-comer's tea.

The Baroness handed the child a third cake, and the child said "No."

"*Tiens!* she is a Dutch child!" cried the Baroness. "But you, Monsieur Ryk, if I offered you a third—anything, you would accept."

"It depends on a third—what!" answered Ryk.

"A third——" she broke off and smiled at him.

"Drink," put in Pareys. "No, Mrs. Chow, you shall

have no anchovy paste, because you recognised Mr. Doris and didn't recognise me." He whistled. From behind a clump of Deutzia a person rose and crept forward. Job Boonbakker, dressed quietly and correctly, as a "valet." "Job, you must send down to the station for Mister Doris's luggage." There was just the slightest little slur of undue emphasis on the "mister" to the man. Yetta coloured, also quite faintly, around the white birth of her golden hair, at the neck.

"This child! This child!" she said. "What are we going to do with her?" She drew the little girl towards her. "Oh, she is full of bruises!" she cried. And now she looked up straight at Lis. Her eyes were dim with tears. The Baroness gave a little sympathetic scream.

"You understand that I couldn't leave her like that!" he said eagerly. "I just brought her straight away."

"From whom? Where? What?" The youthful Maria was trying to stick her finger into the eye of a snarly collie

"You mustn't, dear!" Yetta drew her closer.

"She is probably populous, Yetta," curtly suggested Pareys.

"Not more than the dogs." Yetta wilfully tightened her clasp. "But *where* did you bring her from?"

"My old home," said Lis softly. "Her name is Maria Lariks—eh? I bought her." There was a dead silence. Pareys turned right round to stare at the expectant Job. Job stared, without change of a muscle, at Pareys.

"Well?" said Odo.

All, except the child, gazed at Job. The child's eyes wandered without aim to the dogs and the flowers. Yetta impetuously drew her own eyes away.

Suddenly the man flung up one hand. To the great sun above. To the wide glowing heaven. "I swear by Almighty God," he said coldly, "that I've nothing to do with that child. Nothing more than any one here!" Yetta shuddered in the heat.

"Qui s'excuse, s'accuse," said the Baroness cheaply, throwing buttered toast with dexterity on to the collie's nose. "The child looks miserable: give her to me. A stone dog would pity her, but not, of course, a valet."

"What would you do with her, Sidonie? Could you help us?" demanded Yetta, in vivid relief.

"Put her with your coachman's wife, to clean and—mend her! When I go back to Paris, I will take her with me and make a present of her to my mother-in-law for her 'Oeuvre.' The dowager will be delighted. A little Protestant to save and convert and make good again! She will forgive me—I don't know what. The latest thing she is cross about."

"The 'Oeuvre' is beautiful," said Yetta pensively to Lis. "Out in the country. So much prettier country than this! The child would be happy there."

"And you wouldn't mind the conversion?" urged the Baroness. "Of course not. Because the child wouldn't. You wouldn't care, would you, little one? whether you believed in three gods like your mother, or in four gods like me?"

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Yetta, as wounded. "If we have given up the devotions, let us at least retain the decencies!"

"My dear Yetta!" remonstrated Pareys with manifest reproof. Madame de Rossac pretended not to have heard.

"Yes, yes, let us ensure the happiness of the child," cried Lis, looking at the poor wretch in its new-found tranquillity. "She must forget all about those first years of misery, *there*. Let her go abroad. She must forget even her name!"

"Have you consulted the mother?" negligently questioned Pareys.

"I have bought her. For fifty guilders."

"For a hundred francs? Bravo!" The Baroness clapped her hands. "What a price to pay! You are not a man of business, Mr. Painter. Why, Mynheer Ryk,

you would have bought a grown woman for a quarter that sum."

Mynheer Ryk kicked out at what was nearest. "Are you coming to play tennis?" he said.

"Wait one moment; this is far too important. Bought, was she? Shall we call her Redempta, when she is re-christened? Maria Redempta? When the mother becomes good, *she* can be Maria Maddalena. My mother-in-law will think it means mercy: you and I, Mr. Painter, will know it means cash."

"Mr. Doris," said Yetta with meaning, "can safely leave the matter in the hands of your mother-in-law."

"My dear Yetta, you approve of my mother-in-law, as if you were the same age as she. Coming!—give me a cigarette!"

"How can I thank you, Madame? How can I repay you?" said Lis, as she rose to follow Ryk.

She looked him over. "By painting me."

"Come, Lis, let me shew you your room," said Yetta. "And we'll take this child, who seems half dazed, to a nurse."

XX

SIDONIE DE ROSSAC was the child of a French mother, and of a Dutch father, engaged in the wine business at Bordeaux. She had been brought up in an atmosphere of virtue (as inseparable from the wine trade) and thrift (as agreeable to the French bourgeoisie). At an early age—her age was still early—she had married a spendthrift Paris "gommeux," and the spending had been the chief delectation of her matrimonial existence. Her severe and arch-nosed mother-in-law (there was nothing else arch about the lady) had been its principal bane. Sidonie demanded of life only its cheapest amusements, but these she demanded in unbroken plenty. Her annoyance was that other people always had more money than yourself. More spare cash at any rate. She confessed to a weakness for the impecunious male, if well-favoured, like Ryk. She talked to that idle person all day about horses. She would have talked about motors, if the things hadn't been uninvented, as yet.

Ryk Donderbus, always well-dressed, well-groomed, well-fed, believed himself to know about horses. He was always offering to get you one, a bargain. He knew of a little thorough-bred filly, etc. It was a bore, but decent compared with the modern secret society commission on cars.

He had left the university without ever passing anything, except the lecture-room door. He himself said, he'd been "Called to the *Bar*," but the joke wasn't his. He was a champion tennis player. He didn't play bridge all day, but he would certainly have done so, had the Baroness talked about motor-cars.

These things being thus, two people at any rate enjoyed life at Aldervank. A small child also enjoyed it, at peace, in a world of kind words and kind deeds. The infant Maria Redempta resided with the coachman's wife, awaiting her removal to "Notre Dame des Innocents." The system of her education was easy; as long as you promised not to take her back to her mother, she remained good.

"Send her on or keep her here," said Pareys. "Do exactly as you like. I want every one to do exactly as they like, unless their likings are unendurable to me." It must be admitted, that he seldom put himself in anybody's way. He lived much in his own room, engrossed in his own little interests—his English engravings, for which he had started a pioneer craze, his commendable life of the painter Rousseau: from hour to hour his existence, with its numberless requirements, reposed on the ever-ready ability of his servant. He walked with Job; he talked to Job: he was always watching Job do something for him, or whistling to Job to come and do something else. If one of his guests met them in the woods and spoke to him, he as often looked molested as not. He came amongst his visitors when he chose. It is the only way, he said, to have "friends" in your house.

People dropped in and disappeared. From tea at eight a.m. to whisky at midnight there was always food and drink, as Yetta had said, on some table. To Lis the whole humdrum arrangement was entirely original and new. Local magnates called, whose names had ever been to him as the loftiest stars of heaven. These, however, as a rule proved dull and turgid: more interesting elements arrived by train. Amongst the lordlings and squireens especially Yetta strove to trot out her quondam playfellow. They drove back to their own houses in stupid indignation. The parson's daughter was bad enough: let alone the grocer's boy!

Pre-eminently is the parson's daughter provoking when she wears the divinest Parisian clothing, wears it superbly,

wears it amongst foreign friends as superb in garb and appearance as herself. The absurd Philistines of the neighbourhood climbed into their coroneted carriages and were rude to each other all the way home.

Then, just when he thought he was going to be alone with her, Lis found Yetta was gone. The first evening he had doubted: soon he could not but conclude that she avoided even the semblance, in a full room, of a *tête-à-tête*. At first he felt hurt, then offended. Was it for this she had called him to her feet, after all these years of silence, to dandle him before her new-found lords?

He stopped her on the steps and asked her, in the glorious August morning, full of scents and summer sounds. He had taken, perhaps, an unfair advantage, dawdling in the shade till she came out, late, to feed her pets.

"Mayn't I go with you?" he asked meekly.

She flung a glance over her shoulder, in alarm. "Madame de Rossac will be waiting to sit to you. It is nearly eleven."

"Let her wait," he said roughly. "She has nothing to do."

"Oh, Lis! And she calls you a knight errant!"

"The portrait'll be no good anyhow: I can't do portraits."

"Yes, you can, Lis: you can do what you like." (The old accent was *there*.) "Go and paint. It takes me half an hour to visit the animals."

"And you do it alone. You seem to me to be always alone!" He repented the words the moment he had uttered them. They swelled out: they seemed to spread across the sun.

"Yes, I am very much alone," she said quietly, "I am glad of it. You must not think I am not happy, Lis!" She played nervously with her basket. She moved down a step.

He had to stand aside: he could not turn after her. "'Qui s'excuse, s'accuse,'" he quoted. His French accent was not the Baroness's: they both noticed that.

"Don't be stupid, Lis!" she said, forcing a laugh, "I—I am as fond of you as ever I was. I am proud of you, also. I—I should like to be just as formerly—it's impossible. Don't ask me to explain the inexplicable. It can't be."

"But I can ask you, I must ask you, why at least we mayn't talk together?" he pleaded, to her back, "Why did you send for me, if I mayn't even speak to you! What have I done?"

He had to raise his voice ever so slightly. She stood at the bottom of the steps.

"Oh, hush, hush!" she entreated. "Don't talk like that!"

"Do I flirt and say things like your brother? Can't you trust me to behave myself?"

"I?" she cried, with a sob in her throat, "Oh, Lis!" She threw back her head proudly. "I am watched." Without allowing him another word—not that he would have taken it—she left him standing there. He looked after her as she walked slowly across the gravelled square. In the midst of his great perturbation his look followed her. Never, to his delighted artist eyes, has woman walked as she.

He went up to the attic that did duty for a studio. He had to steady his hand with an effort: he could not clear his brain.

"I like your eyes when they are clouded like that," remarked Madame de Rossac, "And I like them when the sun comes through."

"I am glad you approve of them," answered Lis. "If eyes are the mirror of the soul."

"Now, do you, as a painter, agree to that?" She shifted her position: she was the most tiresome of sitters, as bad a sitter as a butterfly would be.

"I don't know. I can't paint souls."

"You will some day. When the soul is worth your while."

"I don't think so. You flatter me. I can't paint"

portraits. I warned you : this picture is quite unworthy of your face."

"Oho!" she cried, "Aha! The first compliment! After many days. I have never had to wait so long with any man before."

She provoked him : he knew she would tell Yetta that he paid her compliments.

"I don't want to seem rude," he said, "but there isn't any direct connection between good painting and the beauty of the model."

Her eyes flashed : they were expressive, like the whole little black and white face. "You are a boor," she said bluntly. "You are afraid to tell a woman she is beautiful. It is such an easy thing to say. It is seldom true. And we all believe it, true or not."

He painted on, in fierce silence, troubled by those three words upon the steps. The portrait was by no means as bad as he feared—or pretended? He had undertaken it unwillingly, distrustful of his strength. It was a pastel, by her desire, and he had scant experience of pastels. But he was doing it in broad sweeps of colour that to any one less prejudiced than himself revealed the firmness, in this admirable medium, of his delicate touch.

After a minute she conquered her annoyance. "How foolish of you," she said, again shifting the light entirely, "to make an enemy of the one person you need in this house."

He stood aghast, with uplifted palette. "An enemy! surely I have done nothing to offend you. I hope not. I am deeply grateful for what you are doing for——"

She interrupted him. "Bother that child."

"I won't have you for an enemy, Madame. I never had an enemy in my life."

She surveyed him from head to foot. "Are you so sure of that?" she asked slowly.

"Not really an enemy," he rubbed a little grey into the sharp line of her cruel nose.

"An open enemy that slaps your face? No, nor have I. Those are the foes one craves for. I should like—I should like very much—to slap back. I should slap—harder. My enemies all kiss me. Yours——"

She waited. If she vexed him, how did he, by his irresponsiveness, irritate her!

"Yours ask you to stay in their house."

He rubbed in some more grey. She saw it. She insisted on his painting with a big mirror behind him, a torture for any artist. "Don't make me too sharp," she said, "I like people to fancy I'm good-natured."

"You think too highly of me," he protested. "Mynheer Pareys would consider me worthy neither of his love nor of his enmity."

"Nonsense," she said. "The people we are with are always worthy of either. I never can be a whole hour with anybody before I either love or detest them."

"You have Southern blood. Mynheer Pareys is cold as a cod."

"Really?" she laughed. "Do you know, you are quite a new experience. Delightful! Any man I have ever met before would at least have had the grace to ask if it was love or hate I felt for him. You don't. You don't care."

"You must excuse me," he said frowning. "I haven't the manners of your world."

"You must make me prettier! I insist on your making me prettier. I am prettier than you are making me."

She struck the oak seat in which she sat. She had chosen to be painted in a most unsuitable Dutch peasant costume against the high back of an antique Dutch peasant chair.

"I must despair of making you as pretty as you are." He mentally added: "in that dress."

"Don't. You can't manage it. The note is false. I prefer you rude."

He didn't answer. But he boldly went and hung a cloth over the mirror. "There are limits," he said, smiling.

"I know you don't think the costume suits me," she continued, "but it will be something to show in Paris. And I am of Dutch origin. I cannot look as absurd as, say, the tourists who get photographed in Arab dress at Algiers? Have you seen those?"

"No, indeed. I have seen little."

"A painter must travel. First, and then settle down to his one speciality. You don't think the cap suits me?"

"You know I don't."

"You think it would suit a thorough-bred Dutchwoman better? Madame Pareys for instance?"

"It would hide her beautiful hair."

"True, she has beautiful hair!" She tore off the cap with an angry gesture. "Paint me without the cap then! The cap in my lap. We will call it 'At her toilet.'" She laughed at his discomfited face. "When you are a great artist, I shall not be able to do such kind of things. But you are not a great artist yet. Not by any means. You are just a student. And you must be very careful to make a name. It is quite easy."

"Not so easy as you imagine. It needs a thing of which—forgive me, Madame, you have no experience. Hard work. Years of devotion and hard work."

"Indeed no: of years of devotion I know nothing. My devotions last, at the utmost, six months. My latest but two was for my husband. Perhaps that would have lasted a year but for Lent."

"The hard work is the chief thing."

"Fiddleticks! Fuss is the chief thing. *Tapage! Réclame!* I have been thinking about it during these weary waits. It is the easiest thing to set all the world discussing your work. We will do it in two minutes."

"Will you put on the cap again?"

"No. Listen to my plan. We will pop this picture into one of the Club Exhibitions in Paris. My little mouth is

celebrated—you have not noticed it? Yes? Thanks for the nod. Poets have sung to it—the rosebud. Mediocre verses. At little dinners I am given a dessert-spoon to eat my soup with. Voilà! I will ask le Baron de Rossac to put his walking-stick through it in the portrait! because it is not small enough. He will be only too pleased: he likes *tapage*—the newspapers! Has he not walked along the boulevard, carrying a white flag? We will have interviews. I will praise you. Your name will be everywhere, all over the world. If you like you can sue him. It will be a most amusing trial. Très Parisien! About the size of the mouth of the Baronne de Rossac! And you must win."

He laughed loudly, to carry it off.

"I am quite serious. I have done—and enjoyed—much madder things than this."

"And you believe that your husband would allow me to use him as my tool?"

"I believe that my husband would allow me to use him as my tool."

"But all that would not make me a great painter."

"It would make you a famous painter. A painter who was talked about. Women now-a-days have their portraits painted by the man whose pictures get talked about. The day you won your case, you could name your own price."

"And your husband would seem ridiculous?"

"Only for being too proud of his wife. They would forgive that: we have been married so short!"

"I cannot imagine, Madame, why you should take all that trouble for me."

"Not because I am in love with you, Monsieur the painter. If I have a penchant for any one here, it is the lover of horses. But I have a craze for playing the Patroness. For us worldly ones stray good deeds are our only chance of heaven. And they are as diverting as salutary. It is for this I take your Redempta to my mother-in-law. And I grant your Ryk the delight of a passion for a Parisian of the great world. These things have I done before. But to

make an artistic reputation—it will be too droll! *Cher maître!*” She laughed shrilly—a lighter laugh than his!—and sank back altogether into the shade.

He stopped, his hands full of chalk. “It cannot be,” he said. She sat up—there was so much pride in his voice, so much cold courtesy, such a clear touch of scorn, that the laugh died away from her face. It grew suddenly ugly and hard.

“We are talking business, it seems,” she said. “You refuse?”

“Of course I don’t mean to refuse any kindness,” he answered. “But, please, you don’t really want me to owe any chance of a reputation to a—to a trick?”

She jumped from her seat. “Finish your portrait as you like!” she cried. “I do not want your portrait!” She ran out of the room.

He stood gathering his crayons together. One of them dropped and broke.

The door opened: Yetta put her head through. “Sidonie, the silver pheasant—Is she gone?”

“Only this moment,” he answered, his eyes on the picture.

She came into the room, leaving the door wide open. “The silver pheasant has killed the gold pheasant,” she said. “Sheer envy!” She paused by the portrait. “Oh, Lis, did you see her as wicked as that?”

“Do you think so?” he asked lamely—a bit alarmed.

“You have made her—not ugly—but wicked. Yet very like. I wonder—is she really—did you see her as wicked as all that?”

“I painted her as I saw her,” said Lis.

Yetta also avoided his face. “What I said just now was nonsense,” she began: her voice trembled. “At least, I mean, you mustn’t misunderstand. My husband is fond of me. And quite foolishly jealous. Like Othello. And you and I are such old friends. Like Desdemona and Cassio.”

“And what sex is Iago?” he asked.

"Rubbish. There isn't any Iago. You make a tragedy out of what was only a joke. It is high time to get ready for luncheon."

Lis went to wash his hands. He was a long time washing them. "Well," he said with satisfaction, "they're clean."

XXI

THAT afternoon Yetta announced her intention of going to visit some cottages. Pareys, with the inevitable Job, had withdrawn to unpack cases from Paris. The Baroness and Ryk were entirely engrossed by the arrival of a new horse.

Yetta visited all the poor about Aldervank and Boldam. She enjoyed the work, but this does not mean that she was fitted for it. Those who beneficially visit the poor must feel, in the words of the poet, "cruel only to be kind." Yetta, by a ready transposition, was kind, to be cruel. She had grown up under the adverse principle that poverty must be chivied all over the place, back into its own holes, or else into some government hutch. There must be no rest for the wicked, *i.e.*, the pauper. The Parsoness believed in honest poverty, but not in honest pauperism. As long as you suffered in silence, she approved and was ready with not unkindly help, but a squeak was sufficient to mark you down a good-for-nothing, idle and impudent parochially supported bad example. It must be admitted, that a little of this mental attitude was required to make her life tolerable. We all overdo.

Yetta, by contrast, from her château, convinced that rich and poor would always dwell near each other, believed all you could do for the latter was to give them occasionally a hap-hazard good time. The beggars who received a slice of bread and butter and a penny at the kitchen entrance complained abusively that others, by fortuitous contact with "the lady," had netted a whole silver guilder and a hunch of cake off the tea-table. The kitchenmaid was

openly accused of keeping the guilders and eating the cake. Pareys laughed when he heard, through Job. He had never been known to give, without after-thought, anything to anybody.

Yetta's visits to the cottages, therefore, were a picturesque event. She soon discovered, if she was waylaid, and would turn momentarily sensible. Indigence, however, developed an ingenuity which baffled her indifferent caution: the whole thing she deemed rather fun. She had always had a horror of dog-carts, that is, carts drawn by dogs. She paid for a couple of ponies: one of these suspiciously—tentatively—died. She insisted on seeing the corpse. The church-member who mourned its loss was driven into a corner. But he was a religious man: his religion came to his aid. He ended by boldly quoting the last words of St. John xi. 39. Yetta quietly answered that the creature must resuscitate. The other man took warning: his pony lived.

With leaden eyes the Parsoness beheld her daughter's freaks. Eyes loaded and heavy with dull contempt. Being human, Mevrouw Donderbus, however unsnobbish, could not remain cold to the fact that her child was enthroned—Lady of the Manor at Aldervank! She gloried in this elevation, while she dismally denounced it. It brought with it present kudos as certainly as eternal ruin. She spoke of the ruin to her daughter, of the kudos to her friends. In her home-circle she dropped the entirely meaningless "Delilah" and adopted "Jezebel," when angry. "Jezebel?" repeated the weary Dominé the first time he heard her. "So be it, Theodora. Jezebel, at least, was married to a rich man, and handsome, and careful, it appears, about her clothes. The name, at least, has some sense. *My* Jezebel is good to her humble prophet of the Lord. But, then, I am not Elijah."

The Parsoness gave a rough laugh. "No, indeed! Or you'd go up to the Great House" (she liked saying those words) "and scold them!"

"What for?" asked the Dominé, looking up again from his book.

"Just scold them! Do you think Elijah always waited for a reason? You can't have a Naboth's vineyard every day. Though they do say he bought the Jansens' farm too cheap."

"Theodora, I am anxious to finish this verse before dinner," said the Dominé.

The Parsoness snorted. "*I've* plenty to do," she said, "Things that can't wait. I'm going to give that girl of the Boonbakkers a bit of my mind."

For another dairymaid from the Holst was in trouble. "Well, it can't be helped," said Vrouw Boonbakker; "such things have always happened, and I can't see anywhere that Adam married Eve. We've had a long rest, Madam, all the time you were away." Yetta went to see the girl, Santje Vlinders, in her pitiful hut, amongst a cluster, by the wood. The girl lay on her bed, sick with fear and coming shame. Her mother, a tall, pale widow charwoman, all dark lines and sharp corners, had taken her in and upbraided her day and night. Night, for the mother groaned reproachfully in sleep, and the daughter lay listening in tears.

"And I call her conduct foolish, and she ought to be ashamed," said Vrouw Boonbakker, alluding to the mother. "Wasn't *she* young? Wasn't I young? Tell me that! Respectable, was she? So was I. One has luck, and the other hasn't. *Now* I'm old and faded." Vrouw Boonbakker slapped her fat red cheek with her red fat hand. "Hold up your head, Santje, and don't do it again!"

"Go away!" said the girl, hiding her face.

"Tut! Tut! But I know how you feel. Never mind: be young while you can, Santje. Change your mind in time, that's all. Why, I've been good now for five-and-thirty years, ever since Job was born, and never a thing to be ashamed of! Look at Solomon! They call him a wise man. Why, he began at the wrong end, says I!" She cackled. This last was a favourite remark of hers: the old baas had heard it many a time, in silence. Once only he had promised not

to do as the Jewish King in his old age. "I should think not: let me catch you at it!" replied the Vrouw.

Yetta set down her basket by the bed. "I have brought you what you wanted," she said. "Sit up, Santje, and wash your face."

The girl moved heavily, pushing aside her masses of tangled hair.

"Mevrouw's far too good to the likes of you," spat the mother.

"Hush!" said Yetta. She sat talking of trifles: she praised the cleanliness of the poor little hut, till the mother's hard face relaxed. She was interested in the kitten, a very young kitten, on the red brick floor. The girl gazed at the kitten, her cheek on one hand.

Presently the two younger women remained alone together. The widow took Vrouw Boonbakker out to appraise the pig. The air was hot in the single room of the paltry cottage. The place was hot with the effluvia of human sickness and of human health. "Are you going to lie like this all the time, Santje?" asked Yetta, in a low voice. The girl closed her eyes. "Till when?" The girl shuddered. Yetta rose. She took up the silly grey kitten from the floor on which it was happily fooling and placed it in the girl's arm with its fur against her cheek. "Isn't it soft and warm and alive?" she said. "I have got a kitten at home too. And often, when I am quite alone in my room, I take it in my arms and hold it tight." She knelt down beside the bed. "It is warm and soft like this one, and alive—oh alive! And I press it. But it's only a kitten after all." She laid her brow against the fur of the kitten: the two women's heads almost touched.

"My daughter inside, is she?" said the Parsoness's voice on the threshold. "And what are you doing here, pray?"

Yetta had started up. From a child, on the rare occasions when they clashed, she had faced her mother. "I've brought the girl something I'd heard she wanted," replied Yetta with danger in her eyes.

"You know the Relief Fund allows of no begging," the Parsoness angrily began to the widow.

The charwoman was apologetic, but Yetta stopped her. "Nobody begged. I brought this," she said. And from the basket beside the bed she drew forth a bottle of Gold Lack. Its great glittering neck seemed to light up the miserable hut.

"Champagne!" cried the Parsoness, clasping horror-struck hands. "Is it possible? Who is mad, you or I?"

"It's a foolish fancy," admitted Yetta, "The Doctor quoted it yesterday as a foolish fancy. He said there were moments when such fancies should be humoured."

"And advised you to bring *this*?"

"I didn't ask him. I drew my own conclusions. And I've brought you a patent cork, Vrouw Vlinders, which keeps in the fizz for weeks—you see, with this little pipe. She may only have a wine-glass a day!"

"The woman hasn't got a wine-glass!"

"So I brought one." Yetta produced a small liqueur glass. "What does it matter, mother, as long as the girl thinks champagne will save her life?"

The Parsoness, unable to control her feelings, retired, saying there was a child next door that wouldn't come to Sunday School.

The girl, who had lain fondling the kitten all the time, lifted her eyes. She had beautiful slumbrous eyes. "Thank you. You're good to me," she said, still fondling the kitten, "I don't deserve it. I'm a wicked girl,"—and she began to cry. Then Yetta kissed her.

The girl started up. "Lock the door, mother! Don't let that woman in! I don't mind your scolding me: I deserve it. But don't let that preaching woman in with her stories of hell! I can't stand it. I beg pardon, Mevrouw! But what does she know of hell? Hell's feeling you've done wrong and—wanting to do it again!" She sank back, once more covering her face with her hand. "Go away

now, please," she said, "Leave me! I wanted champagne because they say it makes—you—forget." She turned to the wall entirely, in the dark, hot bedstead. Yetta murmured, "I will come again," and went out into the free, fresh air.

XXII

YETTA wandered thoughtfully back towards the house through the Aldervank woods. In spite of all her foreign travel, trees were still an unfamiliar environment to this child of the heath. She breathed—great passionate breaths—in the wind on the wide moorland, with doubtful glance to the black masses banked against the unknown horizon. The Holst stood on the Boldam edge of the forest: the Manor House hid further in its depths. She was in the wood now, for good and all, she felt with a sigh. Around her rose the dark walls shutting out all view. Thoughtfully she wandered back from the cluster of hovels, through a medley of pine and birch and chestnut undergrowth in the stifling August afternoon.

At first the woods were very silent, as silent as her own hushed soul. With the weight of the dull tragedy upon her, she trod, in the still heat, the carpeted glades. All about her the forest seemed waiting, waiting in the changeless mystery of this unending world. For ever and ever the thing goes on, not better, not worse, barely different, driven by the wild whip of passion, none knows whither, nor whence, nor why.

The golden-brown stalks of the pines, the silver bends of the birches seemed to close in upon her: the blue sky dropped in patches through the roofed tracery overhead. And a filmy warmth, heavy with resin, spread about the lower deadness of the stems. She had wandered a little off her path, not lost, but a trifle uncertain. She paused, breathless, impressed by this terrible closeness and quiet of the forest. She was tired: she was hemmed in: she was utterly forlorn.

A motionless gleam of water drew her aside, beyond some chestnut bushes. She slipped down the grey slope of faded needles which encircled, broken by patches of brilliant moss, a steel-blue, stagnant pool. The shiny surface, like a giant's platter, made a break of open air, amidst the infinite aisles, beneath the watchful sky. She glanced up with a sense of deliverance, and sank against some moss by the water.

And suddenly she saw she was not alone, for the water was alive with perceptible life. Ten thousand, ten hundred thousand, sentient, swift, seeking, conscious energies, quivering and flashing, unendingly striving and struggling and straining—visibly, directly intuitive, as the still forest is not. The myriad creatures of a stagnant pool were at work in it and over it: all around her armies of ants were toiling among the needles: a swarm of midgets—a dozen swarms—broke into the sunlight.

She sat watching a couple of ants that helped one another along with some rubbish. A shoal of sticklebacks seemed playing together. Two beautiful dragon-flies were manifestly making love. And sillier, happier than these, a pair of pale yellow butterflies, entirely out of place, chased each other among a cluster of wild dark yellow foxgloves, restlessly content.

And even as she sat there watching them—watching all—and sadly thinking, a twitter reached her ears—a sound, the first, amidst that voiceless, palpitating, far-persistent, medley of motion. A thrush, amongst the ripening rowans, called to his mate. It was only an eager chirp: the days of courtship were over. The response came, as eagerly glad: the female bird fluttered down into the scraggy bush. They were so near to her, the tiny creatures, so self-centred: the lonely woman caught her breath. Her heart was in the dark hovel, with the girl crouching, half-hidden, the kitten against a throbbing bosom, upon the bed. Her heart! Echoes of a German song, heard in some cheerful Rhineland Volksgarten, ran riot along its tremulous strings:

"All things living love and mingle,
Spring descends to kiss the earth!"

The words came over and over again. There were rhymes to that, she remembered vaguely, of "mirth" and "birth." The butterflies flickered wildly. The male thrush chirped. And again!

"All the strength that fills creation
Trembles to the same desire!"

To that the rhyme she knew was fire.

"Rising in restless fire!"

She pressed her hands together. The stifling heat beat down upon her. Fire!

"All things living love and mingle,
Spring descends to kiss the earth!"

What did it matter that it wasn't spring—that spring was past? *She* was spring! She! She! In her youth without bud or promise. In her early beginning of emptiness, and barrenness, and hollow repose. Spring passes. It is passing. Then comes summer. And the hen thrush chirps calm response to her mate.

From the unknown, unachievable distance broke, like a close cry, endlessly present, the hoarse note of the belated cuckoo. It was his farewell: in a few days he must hold his peace. Still eager, through this earliest August, he cried out, in his loneliness, unanswered, again and again. Again and again and again. He cried out, in his loneliness, unanswered, again and again and again.

She stood up, erect, both her palms on her breasts, and she cried back to him, through the listening silence, and the loneliness: she cried back to him, unanswering, unanswered, again and again and again.

XXIII

SHE looked down into the water, at her own face there. She laughed. "You stupid," she said. "You chose, yourself. And it's when we choose that we grumble." Having proved this much to herself, in a whisper, she turned her back on the pool with its living scintillations and walked rapidly, humming too jaunty a tune, along a winding path into the green greyness of the younger, still stunted and full-branched firs.

At a turn, where the prospect suddenly opens out across the heath—at the turn, where the seat is—she happened upon her father, sitting wrapped in his coat (for the Dominé was always cold "in the open") and in thought. "Father!" she exclaimed. For the Dominé never walked, if he could help it, certainly never for delectation or exercise. Still less did he sit outside. That he *could* help. It was his firm conviction that the air was injurious. He always spoke of being "exposed" to the air.

"I was looking for you, child," said the Dominé.

"You want me for something?" She sat down beside him.

"Just for yourself."

"But then, shan't we go back to the House and get some tea?"

"With the others? That would be losing you again, child."

She fastened her eyes on the sand beneath her feet.

"You look b-beautiful," continued the Dominé, contemplating his daughter with a melancholy complacency. "The Baroness Bigi was telling your mother she had seen

you in a dress which must have cost three hundred guilders at least." "Or did she say thirty?" asked the good man in sudden alarm. "Don't let me exaggerate! Was it this one?"

Yetta smiled. "No, another. We had the Bigis to dinner. She wore her nose too high. Like her gown."

"The Baroness Bigi! My dear child, she must have looked splendid! She always does."

"So I thought five years ago, father. Fashions change in five years, outside Boldam."

"They do," said the Dominé gravely, digging in the sand with his stick.

"Don't scold me, dear!" She laid her head against his shoulder. "What did mother say to my expensive clothes?"

"She said you looked like—a queen," replied the Dominé hastily, "like an Oriental queen. And that reminds me, Yetta, there *was* a reason for my coming. You see what an egoist I am. I've got stuck over the toilet things in Isaiah. What is a 'wimple,' is distinguished from a 'hood'? And, oh, what is a 'crisping-pin'? There is much uncertainty about the latter!" The Dominé's countenance lengthened. "Some translate it 'a satchel.' A very different thing."

"No, it isn't, dear. I mean, they could either curl their hair with a pin or in a curlpaper. I daresay it means a 'curler'—just both!"

"How ingenious!" exclaimed the Dominé, greatly impressed. "What a critic you would have made, Yetta! After all, ingenuity is the root of all exegesis. We must consider the conjecture. Will you come in one morning to help me with the passage? To think that you women—with your brains!—spend half your lives to-day as you did five thousand years ago in dressing yourselves up! The mummies wore rouge, Yetta. And I fear Amos, had he seen you, would have called you a Cow of Bashan."

"Cows don't wear rouge," answered Yetta, with just a tinge of petulance. "Nor do I. Our colour's natural."

The Dominé caught the tone. "Quite right," he admitted humbly. "Besides Amos was undeniably rough. Un-d-d-deniably." He rejoiced in saying such a thing aloud, away from his flock.

"You mustn't despise me, father. And you mustn't overrate my brains. But, oh, father, above all, you mustn't despise me!"

"My sweetest!—because you wear such pretty clothes?"

"Oh, you know what I mean! I didn't wear pretty clothes the first years. I had a better use for my money then. Odo used to be so annoyed with me. He never said anything, only looked: that's his way. Now, at least, he sometimes looks pleased. But you have seen Madame de Rossac? He thinks she dresses much better than I."

"I have not noticed. I thought her very noisy," said the Dominé. "You must wear things he likes, Yetta. You must please him as much as you can."

"Yes, father," she replied wearily. They sat gazing at the haze, far away over the heath-land. "What made you say that?" she asked at last. "No, don't answer!" she cried hastily. "Don't."

"Why not? A wife should always endeavour to please her husband as much as she reasonably can."

Yetta's thoughts turned to Clasine, the mistress and stay of the Parsonage.

"Yes, 'reasonably': I do my best," she said, and again: "Only don't despise me, father!"

"But, Yetta, do you find me so ready to despise?"

"No, that's just it. That's just why. That's what I've wanted to say, and daren't. What I'm longing to ask. How do you manage, dear old father? It seems to me nothing stops love like contempt." She shuddered, as the word fell from her lips. "That's what I'm so afraid of, despising—people! Oh, father, how do you manage to go on loving, and to keep down contempt?"

A clear flush mantled the Dominé's scholarly cheek. He had understood. He waited to shape his reply.

"Our mistake is," he began with an effort, "that we ask more of our friendships—our loves, if you like—than they can give. Every human energy is limited. Whatever the poets may say, no two natures close on each other like the halves of a shell."

"True," she said, submissively.

"We can only expect to overlap here and there," he insisted, warming to his subject. "All we can do is to extend the laps."

"But to despise—to despise!" she persisted, clinging, as he eluded her.

"My good girl, I will tell you a little Eastern story. As in the old days, eh?—in Abraham's B-Bosom? When Gharib took that famous journey of his from Bhagdad to Damascus, he came nigh, in the magical desert, to dying of thirst. One evening he sank to rest in a cave after strong p-prayer to Allah for water, and such was his faith in the All-Merciful that he put out, under the star-lit sky, his brass cooking-pot—you have seen them in the East?"

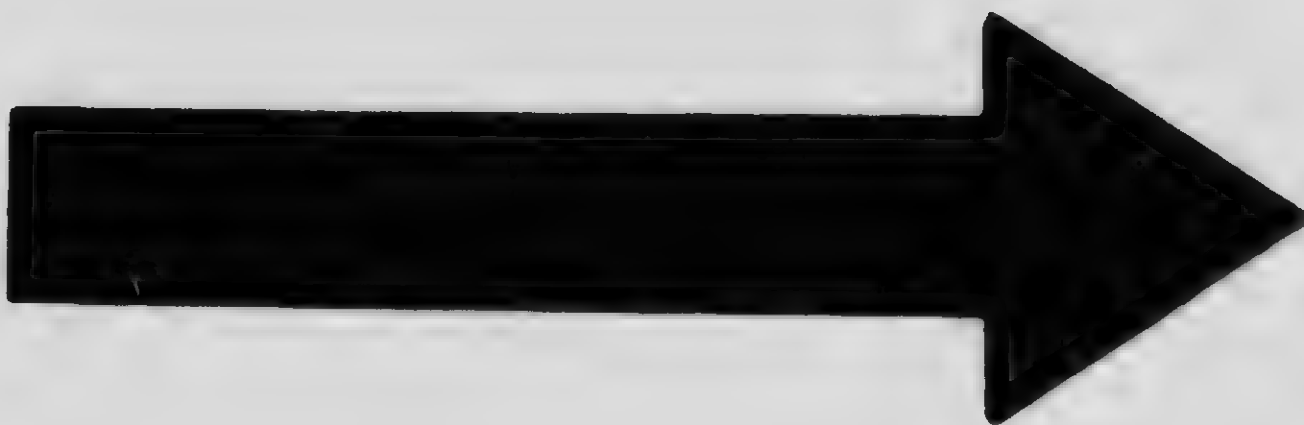
"Yes, father."

The Dominé sighed. "I have not. They are the same mentioned constantly in the Bible. He put out his cooking-pot, and the flat cover beside it. And he cried out to Allah to fill the pot.

"When he awoke in the morning, rain had fallen. So much that the pot was full to overflowing. On the cover there lay not one drop. 'Allah is all-powerful,' said Gharib. 'Had my faith but been greater, I had prayed for a like column of water to stand up on the lid!' Thus he spoke, and he put the dry lid on the full pot and, ashamed, journeyed on.

"He was wrong, Yetta. God is no conjuror. As the size of the pot, such is the liquid it holds, and a flat c-cover holds no liquid at all. M-marriage is too often a union of the pot and the lid. They fit, dear. They cling. Divorce mixes the lids and the pots." The Dominé's voice took a note of alarm.

"But to despise!" she murmured.



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"Has my little story no effect? Who are we that we should despise?—and what for? Does the pot despise the lid for not holding water, or the lid despise the p-pot for being wet? Some dry natures, Yetta, cannot endure a moist soul. As for c-contempt, I never yet met a human creature, whom I did not reverence for being one."

Yetta pressed against him. Their gaze had shifted from the pearly mists on the horizon: they were looking, both of them, towards the tiny steeple, the dim little cluster of Boldam.

"Whilst I am sitting idly philosophising here," remarked the Dominé, "your admirable mother is doing all the work of the p-parish. If I should do it differently—and don't—the more shame to me! I think we ought to go and give your husband his tea, Yetta. He is not sentimental like you and me, but he has excellent qualities."

"He will certainly not have waited for us," said Yetta.

The Dominé rose: "The more shame to us that we were not there in time."

XXIV

THE Dominé did not stay long in the tea-circle, among the dresses and the dogs and the tin. A good deal of French was being spoken, and much of the laughter arose around him, which is as the crackling of thorns. His flannelled son Ryk was to the front: the son eyed not the father with favour; the father eyed the son. "Where is Lis?" inquired the Dominé, seeking for sympathy. No one had seen Lis throughout all the long afternoon.

No one had missed him. No one except the Baroness Bigi, who came to pay what is still called "a visit of digestion" over there. "I should like," she said, with graduated patronage, "to have seen your grocer's boy who paints. I paint." The Baroness Bigi van Tietstjumperadeel sat supported by her husband and three of her five daughters. Not that she needed support, for her back was as straight and flat as her conversation. She was out and away the great lady of the neighbourhood, as her husband was the great little man. The five daughters were unmarried, because it had proved impossible to find barons as stupid as themselves. These must have existed in plenty, but the Baroness Bigi had somehow not had the luck to discover them. She was not quick at recognising stupidity. She had brought her daughters to Aldervank, that they might see how these queer people live.

"I am a personage of very great importance," said the Baron Bigi. Perhaps those were not the actual words, but it was the impression.

"So strange that any one without education should

paint well," remarked the baroness. "I cannot understand it. Art is refinement."

"He doesn't paint well," said Madame de Rossac, viciously. "He has made a horrible portrait of me!"

"Is it possible?" asked an unknown youth with a sloping forehead.

Mevrouw Bigi nodded comprehension. "I am not surprised," she made answer.

"It is a banquet!" reflected the three spinster Baronesses, with their eyes on the tea-table. At home they had Marie biscuits and, for a visitor, toast.

"Oh, come: he paints very decently: I gave him his first lessons," put in Pareys.

"I am a personage of very great importance," said the Baron Bigi. Odo called the Widow Chow away from her nest on the Baroness's blue satin skirt. The Widow Chow was aged: both she and the skirt had known younger and cleaner days.

But the Baroness rose to depart. She had seen what she wanted to see and so felt bored. Everything and everybody bored her and hers, outside the small circle of which they were the centre. The centre and the shining light. They were all of them deeply religious. Which means that nobody in the circle except their equals was permitted any form of luxury or amusement. Religion proved that there was a possible heaven for everybody, and that therefore the earth was for Barons alone. Religion reserved front seats in heaven for those who had front seats on earth. "I thank God I am not as these!" said the Baroness, rising.

"The carriage is coming up, sir," said an Aldervank servant at the Baron Bigi's elbow.

"Baron, if you please," corrected that gentleman. As he walked along the orange tubs he remembered something. Stopping for a slow fumble, he produced and handed to the servant a tract, against drink.

Pareys came back to the tea-table with unwonted laughter. "*That*," he remarked to Sidonie, "is what your

father and mine saved us from by taking us to Brussels and Bordeaux. I am glad these people did not clash with our artist guests, who ought to be here in a few minutes. I was beginning—could I do such a thing—almost to worry."

"I hear wheels," said Ryk. "The cob trots so fast."

Pareys threw to the barking dogs cakes for which the proud gorge of the maiden Bigis had watered. A moment later he was welcoming with marked courtesy the newcomers from the Hague. A great Dutch artist, one of the greatest, bringing with him as great, and still more loudly famous, a Parisian prince of painters, "*en villégiature*" at Scheveningen, and "*absolument charmé de vos brunes blondes*."

"*Absolument charmé de nos brunes blondes ?*" echoed, showing her white teeth, Madame de Rossac.

"I said '*brunes*,'" replied the artist, nettled. He was accustomed to being called, reverently, "*Cher maître*." His head was leonine, his manner splendid. The sharp little Dutchman crept beside him, like a lynx-cat. He magnanimously admired, did the Frenchman, the eighteenth-century French taste of the house. It recalled to his memory a place or two which he mentioned, built in the halcyon days of Marie Antoinette. "You had good imitators!" he said. "Ah, French workmen? Just so. The line of the trees is good, opposite—the beeches against the blue!"

"That is nature—after all, the best workman," protested the Dutch painter.

"I entirely disagree with you," remarked Madame de Rossac, with vigour. She turned, so that all might see how much nature had been improved. "Will these gentlemen take tea? It seems Yetta has fled."

"She goes the round of all those animals twice a day," answered Odo, annoyed.

"She likes solitude. Well, who wants tea?"

"It is too strong for my nerves as you make it here," objected the big Frenchman. "You do not happen to have camomile?"

"Ah, for that you must ask the lady of the house!"

"Lady of the house, nonsense!" Pareys scowled, as he whistled. "Job, come here! Go to the kitchen and ask somebody for camomile." It was not Job's least merit as a servant, that he invariably executed an order whether he understood it or not. He slunk away through the bushes, murmuring "Camel-oil."

"But you yourself, I understand you are an artist?" interrogated the Master.

"Oh, yes, I am an artist." Pareys, glancing round swiftly, saw a faint grin die away across the faces of his circle. Yetta had come back swinging her empty basket. He fancied he caught the same shade of mockery on her brow.

"He is too modest!" teased the Baroness. "Nobody but his servant has ever seen any of his work!"

"We will see it. We have come to see it," dictated the great foreigner. "We have houses such as these, and better, in France. We demand the pictures!" He looked round for his little Dutch colleague. "Jacob," he said, "is it not so? We have come to see the pictures? This gentleman's own, and also the Rousseaus."

"The Rousseaus?" Everybody, even Ryk, either uttered or looked the cry.

"Surely you told me that we should find here a great collection of Rousseau!"

"I said a great *connaisseur* of Rousseau. Monsieur is writing his life."

"How can one describe without seeing? I understood there was a collection here. I have been enjoying it, in prospect, all the long hours in the train."

The kind Jacob moved wretchedly on his chair. Pareys actually looked hurt. There was a very uncomfortable silence. "We will do our best to amuse you till to-morrow," said Yetta. The Cher Maître had as yet hardly perceived her: his face lighted.

"Doubtless, Madame, there is the good work of your husband."

"Yes, and we have work which I think——"

Pareys violently interrupted her. "You shall see my work," he said with sudden fierce resolve. "A lot of it! It isn't good: I don't pretend it is, but I do my best. All these kind people laugh at it, including my wife! No man nowadays is a hero to his friends!"

"Why, you haven't let me see any of it for years!" exclaimed Yetta, opening her eyes. There was an ugly glint in his.

"No, not since you told me I should never be worth anything. Well, you shall see it to-night after dinner. Where is your friend, Lis? Out still? It is time we all went to get ready."

There was no excuse at all for the irritating question. Lis constantly stayed away whole days at his painting, not even returning to lunch. And Job slipped out, in long enervating glides under cover, after Yetta, if she wandered by any chance in the same direction as Lis. Like so many a farmer's son, Job was a poor walker: of these spurts, warts, and watchings he wearied unutterably, for never would he have ventured to utter a word of complaint. His lubberly figure was difficult to hide: he felt by no means secure that he had always succeeded in hiding it. He trembled at thought of failing to execute his master's commands. He lived two lives, entirely disjoined, and had done so for years. The one was all slavery: the other self-indulgence. Beyond the aura of his master he had licence to be himself.

Intended by nature for evil, his weak will, when released, sought the pleasantest wrong. His enchanter was fain it should be so, advising him always to do what he liked best. His mother added the counsel to repent before dying, but he had long got beyond any impression from that. His impressions were simple: pleasing yourself, when you needn't please Pareys. But the latter task was a labour of the Danaides. He worked in the sweat of his brow. Often his juvenile training here came to his aid: he would pray earnestly, whilst believing in nothing, for Divine Help to

execute his despot's evil commands. Pareys slept like a child, often eight or nine hours. In the night, then, Job Boonbakker had leisure to drink, anywhere, or otherwise amuse himself. In the morning he would glide from the cupboard next to his master's bathroom and, clean, subservient, with eyes downcast, he would say the day was fine. He had orders to say so always, that Pareys might get up. If the view revealed rain, the figure in pyjamas as often as not flung some missile at "the liar!": a book or a bootjack. The big fellow quietly put these away. Every morning, after some escapade, he approached his lord in a white terror of discovery. His life, in a word, despite its debauches, was a hell upon earth.

But he loved money, with a miser's love of hoarding, of piling up and looking at gold. On the nights when bad weather kept him in, he would fetch forth his money-bags from the chest under his bed. Pareys remunerated him extravagantly: only in the worst of tempers did the master torment the slave by pretending, as he called it, to "close the tap." Then the slave would weep miserably, in the stillness of his midnight cupboard, and also, when some journey was undertaken, and the gold had to be changed for banknotes and carried hidden on the breast. But, rewarded or not, he slaved steadily on.

He loved nobody but Pareys: he hated nobody but Lis. In Lis he saw some sort of a rival. He hated Lis.

OUT on the heath, all through the long afternoon, Lis had worked, laggingly at first, then increasingly faster, then at red-hot fever heat.

His head was in a whirl from the morning's experiences. Yetta's disclosure, the Baroness's proposal, these by themselves, in his simple existence, were troublous enough. He rattled the few guilders in his pocket. Already he knew enough of modern conditions to realise the perfect feasibility of the plan he had rejected. Six months hence the whole world would have talked of him. He would have been what that world now-a-days demands of its art-workers, "Un amuseur."

And, as if these emotions were not enough, the coming had been announced, at lunch, of the far-famed French Master! The coming of the lesser Dutchman, still mightier to Lis! He fled from them, in yearning and fear. His heart bumped against his ribs. In the evening he must see them, might speak.

The thought of their work drove him out of his own. He had laboured incessantly of late. But when had he not laboured incessantly? He was no drearier. He knew that every honest success was made up, as he had said, of devotion and hard work. He would show the Baroness de Rossac that the labourer could be worthy of his reward.

For days after his return to his birthplace he had painted the Aldervank trees, avoiding the heath. It was certainly no false pride that kept him away from Boldam. He went to church there, recognising everybody, hearkening to the Dominé, gazing at his cotton-wool clouds in the roof—as

good, at least, he had to own, as Pareys's beefsteaky cherubs. He walked and talked about the village. He proposed to the Parsoness to paint her portrait. She declined, from a religious scruple, not understandable. He drew a lifelike sketch of the delighted Clasine, on the sly. He replied to the expostulatory groceress that he wouldn't pay a halfpenny more for "Redempta," with a hard-set scorn that cowed the truculent brute. He made half a dozen beautiful drawings of his father's very humble grave. He sent a box of "Boldam moppies" (a horrible clay-ball cookie in which the slapping neighbour excelled) to the Lokster children at Amsterdam.

But at last he broke away from his own foolish shrinking and rushed straight at the heath. Right into it, far away from everybody, right into its loneliness, alone. Perhaps it was four days, perhaps five, after his coming. He could endure his own hesitation no longer. He couldn't delay a moment. He rushed forth, for a sight, for a breath, of the heath. It called him irresistibly: he had kept back too long. Suddenly, in the night, the longing swept over him, as a storm-flood that breaks through a dike. He flung back the shutters from his open window: already the smell of the heather had pierced through them: its fragrance swelled fiercely through his brain. The soft summer night, like sweet lavender, pale mauve and starry, lighted the far distance, between the blackness of the woods. Yonder it lay, yonder, unseen, calling from its silence. The huge clumps of round beech bore down upon him, pressing their blank walls against his chest. Yonder it lay, miles upon miles of it—open, free, cool. He clambered down along the clamps of a water-pipe, laughing gleefully. He ran eastwards, laughing and sobbing, alone with his thoughts and the stars.

He lay out on the heath that morning, unexhausted, waiting for every slow development of the dawn. In spite of his excitement he was too much of an artist to have forgotten his materials. And already he possessed to a strong degree

that artist memory, the power of storing colour for reproduction, which colleagues have so often noted as one of the secrets of his success. At last, when the sunlight had changed from black to greyest pink the first awakening of faintest bloom upon the heather, he flung himself down on it, and clasped at great bunches of it, laughing and sobbing, with both hands. And he stood up, drawing deep breaths, gazing away, over it,—miles and miles of it, the heather, his heather, his heath.

He snatched at his paint-box : he began eagerly to paint it. The marvellous effect of the grey, coming bloom in the grey, coming twilight. He painted it, marvellously, lilac-grey against slate-grey. Still more marvellously he painted at home the night memory, mauve-grey against purple-grey. "Summer Night on the Heath."

After that, during ten days, except for his burdensome portrait, he painted morning and evening, in oil and in water-colour, chiefly in water-colour, the heath ! He had abandoned his Sandpoort Dune picture. For the great Feydor Prize, on which his whole future depended, he had resolved to compete with a painting of his own native heath.

In spite of all toil he had not as yet got the effect—no, not even the idea—which he wanted. He was dissatisfied with his colour-schemes. Ever, while he worked, the feathery film of the luminous Dutch landscape sank away from the canvas under the weight of his brush. Once, at the dinner-table, he lifted two peaches from a dish and, scrubbing one clean with his napkin, placed the two fruits before him side by side. The rest of the company exchanged glances. "What is the joke?" questioned Ryk after a time. The painter started from his long contemplation, abashed. "Nothing," he answered lamely, "nothing," and he has red, blushing, to put the peaches back. He painted on desperately, over and over again, the same bit unwearyingly, living with it, dreaming of it,—the heath. One small bunch of heather taken home, he reproduced, in its changes of colour, at least twenty times in ten days. He got up at three o'clock one

night, unable to sleep, for the itching of his fingers to have another try at it. Unlike so many who contentedly work over, he scraped every unsatisfactory blotch clean with the knife, and immediately repainted it, straight ahead, in clear strokes.

And suddenly, on that blazing afternoon, it seemed to him as if, in the midst of blossom and sunlight he was painfully mirroring on the canvas, something remained from his brush of the silvery lustre asleep in the skies. A rage of effort surged through him, beating against his temples, and left him, the next moment, fixedly calm. "I will show them what I can do!" he said aloud, to the far trees of Aldervank. All the pain and anxiety changed to impulse and passion. The broad sweep of his touch fell so lightly, it left—at last!—in the few pearly tones that he needed some thought of the transparent radiance he had longed and striven to give back. At last he could gaze at the pictured cloud-land before him with other feelings than of anger and shame. He painted on forgetful of everything, till the shimmer died away from the heavens. But it lived upon his landscape, his "Heat on the Heath." For the first time he had developed his remarkable gift in the transposition of tone against tone. He stood away from his day's work, tremulous, full of the possibilities of the future. He stood, on the still heath, under the slow sinking of the shadows. And he lifted, in the joy of creation, his eyes, and his heart, to a solitary star!

XXVI

"CAN I speak to you for a moment, before we go down?"

"Of course. I am always and entirely at your service." Husband and wife paused, opposite each other, in their evening dress.

"I do not demand such devotion as that," replied Yetta, fidgeting with her fan, "but you make it easier for me to ask you a slight favour. I want you to renew your promise to me never to tell Lis about the—the money."

Pareys leant against the wall. They were in the gallery at the top of the staircase. "People who renew promises surely don't keep them," he said. "But I don't think I remember making this one."

"In the church—on that day," persisted Yetta nervously, "I stipulated that you would leave me quite free."

"If my memory serves me—it was an important occasion—I promised to ask no questions. I never promised to find no replies."

She beat her white satin foot on the polished floor. "I don't understand," she said. "I am neither a Jesuit nor a Jew."

"How neatly put! But how feminine! Wit is not argument. Ah, what a world this would be, if it were!"

"You re-use then? I have little wit of my own, Odo, but I have learnt to read yours."

His hands were in his pockets: he looked at her curiously. "Your choice of the moment is so exceedingly unfortunate. There is a note on Lis's table, that I must speak to him, absolutely the moment he comes in."

"You refuse?" she reiterated vehemently. She waited. He saw that she was trembling. "Then I also, I consider myself released from any promise I ever made to you."

He smiled gravely. "Even from those you made at the altar?" It was his turn to wait. He smiled again. "You have reduced them to a minimum anyhow." He leant over the balustrade. "There is Lis, just come in. Will you excuse my calling to him? Time presses: the matter is of far greater importance to me than you can think."

"You refuse?" her voice was hoarse. She sank back, drowning, clutching vainly, in search of a straw.

"Be reasonable. What can you care? He is sure to hear sooner or later. Lis!"

Lis came up the broad staircase, with the bend in it. He was hot and exhausted: he carried his things under his arm.

"You have a talent," continued Pareys under his breath, "for making the simplest things I do appear—brutal! It is, I assure you, an unpleasing quality in a wife." She cast him a look of despair. And slowly, splendidly, she went down the stairs, as Lis Doris came up them.

She had no time to collect her thoughts, for the two stranger artists were standing near the open door of the drawing-room. The Frenchman came out to her. "We look forward," he said, with a punctilio born of chagrin, "to seeing after dinner the paintings of Monsieur Pareys!"

A sudden inspiration seized her. "I have a couple of pictures in my room which might interest you," she said, leading the way. He followed, suppressing a yawn. Pictures thus thrust under your nose in a strange house were things he felt naturally afraid of, nor did he care about discovering unknown geniuses, especially if not French. He was a facile painter of society portraits—women only—past his prime (though he did not know it), but a Commander of the Legion of Honour and a member of official committees. "But come then!" he said to his little Dutch friend.

From the locked cupboard under an inlaid Marie Antoinette Secrétaire (Belgian, I should say, thought the painter)

Yetta drew forth, carefully wrapped in cloths, the two German landscapes Lis had sold at the Amsterdam Show. Both men noticed that she at once placed them in the best light. Evidently they had come out of that hiding-place before. She stood away from them, her anxious interrogation passing swiftly to and fro. The Frenchman was studying her far more intently than the canvases. Every woman of position he met was to him a desirable or an undesirable portrait. His gaze rested with refreshment on this daughter of the North in her simple white satin, observing the delicately varied carnation peculiar to the damp atmosphere of the Netherlands, and following, at each turn in the shadowed sunlight, the soft shimmer of her Saxon hair.

"Yes, very interesting, yes," he said negligently. "You would make a beautiful picture yourself."

"Don't you think they show talent?" she pleaded: she turned to her compatriot. "Don't you?"

Her earnestness made the great man look again. "Oh, very good," he said. "But yes, very good. Very good." His tone was so light: his praise slipped from the canvas to the floor. Her brow clouded: she had expected him, whatever she might fancy, to exclaim in an ecstasy.

"The work is good," said the quiet little Dutchman, who was examining it with puckered eyes. "A trifle immature and hard. German. Too much influenced by Achenbach. A young man, I presume?"

"Yes. How did you know it was a man?"

"It is a man's work. Have you any more—later—by the same hand?"

"No, nor have I ever seen any. The artist, like my husband, won't show it. Not yet, he says. Not till it is better." (The Dutchman nodded.) "Oh yes, a portrait—a pastel—of Madame de Rossac, unfinished. You must see it. He is staying in the house."

"Of Madame de Rossac?" put in the Frenchman. "That will be curious. Not easy. She has a very paintable face for the man who can do it. Hardly beauty"—he

bowed to his hostess—"but attractiveness—eh? The desire to please. Charm."

"You shall see all we have to show after dinner." She turned away with a sigh. Had her husband really accomplished, in his long solitudes with his servant, anything worth submitting to such a guest as this? She could not fathom his projects: he left her, as always now, vaguely disquieted. There was mischief in his eye.

Was there mischief in his eye, as he smiled to Lis Doris? A stranger would have found it difficult to say. "Will you come with me one moment?" he asked gently. "Yes, you will be late for dinner. Never mind."

"I see your visitors are come," remarked Doris, obeying the command.

"They are come. The Frenchman is very Parisian. Jacob Raff is—Jacob Raff."

"A genius," said Lis.

"True—in fisher-boats. But it is far more profitable now-a-days to be a man of enormous talent than a man of slight genius."

"It always was," said Lis, shifting his load.

"I think not, not in simpler times. But I haven't stopped you to talk of that. I wish you would put down all that luggage, Lis." Again Lis obeyed.

"It's a fad of yours never to show any of your work. Now, who knows what good stuff there may be in *that*!" Pareys pointed.

"I would rather not, please." Lis Doris laid a hand on the strap. "I'm not ready. Some day. Later."

"Just so. You haven't let any one here see a single thing, have you? except the portrait."

"No."

Pareys hesitated. He was a pale man, unapt to show colour. But his sallow cheek tinged slightly, as he added, staring out of the window:

"Not even Yetta?"

"No."

"So I thought. You are very odd. Will you have a cigarette? You smoke sensibly, not like me. You are altogether much more sensible than I."

Lis did not answer. He sat down and wiped his hot face.

"Still, I think you ought to show something of your work to the people who have helped you to produce it."

Lis was silent, searching for a meaning.

"We have always taken such an interest in you from the very first."

"It was very good of you—and her," murmured Lis, eager to separate the names, unwilling to recognise a benefactor in Pareys. Suddenly it seemed to him that they were playing, in a great hurry, a game of chess. Why didn't Pareys say: "Check-mate?"

Pareys said, quietly studying his polished shoe-tips: "I was sure I could count on your gratitude."

"Do you wish to make a special demand on it?" questioned Lis, mustering, as it were, his poor pawns.

"My dear boy, how brusque you are. Not a bit changed since the day we first met, when you flung down your box."

"I have always kept that box. It was kind of you," said Lis, abruptly, resolved to be generous.

"I fear I have not kept your cloud-scapes. Don't you think, now, that they were rather expensive? Well, we have paid bigger prices for some of your possessions since then."

"Now it is coming," thought Lis, wondering what?

Odo blew a little cloud of blue smoke from his thin lips. His eyes were fixed on something, anything, in the trees across the court.

"The house, for instance—at least we have kept that."

"The house?" stammered Lis.

"Yes. We could hardly have sold it again for five thousand guilders." He laughed an amused little laugh.

"I should be grateful, if you would tell me what you mean."

Pareys came away from the window. "You don't mean

to say you think the house was worth five thousand guilders ? You know perfectly well it wasn't worth two."

"Did you buy the house ?" exclaimed Lis.

"Not I. But Mevrouw Pareys did. And she has dressed in rags accordingly. Last year she paid off the last instalment to the Notary. And ten per cent. interest, as I hear." Pareys chuckled softly. "She could have borrowed at a cheaper rate from me."

"Yetta bought the house !" echoed Lis confusedly. "And paid, you say, far too much ?"

"My dear Lis, I am willing to admit you didn't know about Yetta. But it surely isn't natural that you never cared to inquire who had paid you three times the value of your house !"

"The Dominé said it was worth it !" Lis caught at his picture, grasping it tight.

"My father-in-law ? I suppose he would be capable of saying as much without previous arrangement with his daughter. I presume he's a better judge of mansions in heaven."

"I will do anything to repay you !" said Lis, his face gone from red to white.

"Anything ? That is a great deal more than ten per cent. I am not such a usurer as that. Besides, the gift was my wife's."

"Some day I shall sell pictures. I have already sold two."

"I know you have."

"They sold pretty well. Better than I had dared to hope. Soon I trust I shall do better still."

Pareys stood before him and nodded gently. "How I envy you, my boy ! How I wish I was young and had illusions ! Yes, undoubtedly your pictures sold 'pretty well.' Almost as well as the house !"

"How do you know ? Why do you say that ?" Already a horrible suspicion had risen into his throat.

"I know, because I know what an unknown picture

is worth, painted by an unknown student, who still has to——"

"Learn to paint," cried Lis bitterly.

"Oh, no, long after that! Who still has to make his way. Let us hope, as you say, you may soon do better still."

"Yetta bought them!" cried Lis.

"Your naïveté is distressing," retorted Pareys, with a clear touch of scorn.

"I will do anything—anything to pay you back! I would give my heart's blood to do it."

"You are melodramatic—unnecessarily. And you overrate the value of all your possessions. I do not want your heart's blood, besides. There is the dinner-bell. I must hurry down. Don't be foolish. Dress as quickly as you can."

XXVII

WHEN Lis hastily took his seat, he had the painful satisfaction of remarking how little difference it made to anybody, whether he turned up or not. Yetta nodded to him. She was outwardly calm. She had always imagined her husband could only do her one hurt she would really be wretched about. She had always expected him to do it. She believed he had done it to-day.

The company was noisy, for the artists had warmed to a subject at first cautiously avoided: art. The Frenchman, grown genial under the influence of an excellent Laffitte, was extolling the moist tints of Dutch scenery: he had hit on a phrase which he liked and repeated: *La blondeur rose des terrains*. "You must have seen it," he cried. "You must have seen to believe it! *La blondeur rose des terrains!*"

Madame de Rossac remarked that she didn't like scenery. When called upon to explain, she said the stupidest person could understand what she meant. She would like to hear about the beauties the "Maître" had painted. No, not of her own world: she knew about those.

Lis sat listening. Ryk condescended to talk to him across the table, for neither of these young men was very fluent in French. Ryk wanted to tell him all about an Irish chestnut that was such a capital jumper. Lis could ride—he had learnt at Düsseldorf for the delight of it—but he did not belong to the class which is bound to know all about a horse.

"I will shew you my portrait: it is being painted by Monsieur," said the Baroness, spitefully. The jerk of her head was the young man's introduction. "You must decide if it flatters me or not."

"Monsieur is lucky in his beginnings," said the Frenchman amiably. "At my age he will appreciate such a sitter. As I should, still."

"It must be delightful," cried the Baroness, "to be painted by you!"

"Oh!—delightful!" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes. First because the portrait is bound to be a fine one. And, secondly, because everybody is sure to talk of it." She glanced across at Lis. No need *there*, her glance said, to drive a stick through my mouth!

"I am at your orders," said the Maëstro, enchanted to hear, to his face, in the "secondly," words he knew dozens of fair ones to have thought.

"Yes, notoriety is an attraction no woman can resist," said Pareys, "Eh, Yetta?"

Yetta seemed to be finding some relief in the conversation of her unobtrusive but gifted companion. She had not heard the others. She daily deplored the money-spending uselessness of her brother and her husband. And she wanted to encourage Lis.

"I suppose every woman loves fame in a man," she replied.

"You have answered well. You have answered well indeed," retorted her husband. He emptied his glass at one gulp.

The Dutch painter began to tell, in slightly halting French, the touching story of Rodini, not so well known then as now. Of Rodini who avowed to Minet in his last illness that he had worked himself to death to gain the Prix de Rome his wealthy sweetheart had demanded as a safe proof of his genius. "He died before the verdict," said Jacob Raff. The artist's eyes were moist.

"A prix de Rome is no real proof of merit," said Pareys.

"You may not say that! No, of all men you may not say that. You may not say it now, here, to us!" Raff's voice rang out. All listened.

Pareys threw up his hand. "My dear Raff, don't excite

yourself! I thought we were amongst ourselves here and might drop our mantles. I confess I am an unbelieving prophet and an ignorant judge."

"I maintain that an honest judge and a sincere prophet will know as a rule to distinguish better work from good." Raff is not a society man: he struck his fist, lightly, on the table.

"And what other criterium have you, for beginners?" cried Lis. "It's a splendid chance! It wakes us all up."

"Are you going in for the Feydor Bequest?" questioned the Frenchman, with awakening interest.

"Yes," said Lis.

"With my portrait?" cried Madame de Rossac. "Who are the Jury? I won't have a second Prize!"

"That's all rot. In nine cases out of ten 't is the best horse that wins," remarked Ryk, in Dutch.

"How about outsiders?" objected Yetta.

"In nine cases out of ten there's cheating of some kind," declared the Baroness. "And I dare say it's the same with art."

"No, no, no, no," said the Dutch artist.

"So the Stewards would say. You are partial. Everything goes by favouritism in this world."

"And the next," concluded Pareys. "Quite true. All the prizes of existence go by favouritism or fluke. That's the worst of these awards, as Mr. Doris was remarking. The young fellows believe in them. The luckiest thing that can happen to a strong man is not to gain a prize."

"Could you explain why?" asked Raff hotly.

"Yes. Did you get your gold medal?"

"I did not, and you know the reason. There was a better man than I."

"You have explained for me. You thought he was better, and that is why to-day you are better than he." The artist, too modest to discuss the point, turned with mild protest to his hostess. A few minutes later, in the conservatory, he asked Lis for a light.

"You must not take our host at his word," he said.
"When the time comes, he will judge as honestly as we."

"I must confess I should not like to be judged by him,"
replied Lis.

The Hague painter stared at the speaker, discomfited.
"Are you really not aware that Pareys is one of the judges?"

"No, I asked about the conditions. I didn't trouble
about who is going to decide."

"He represents the family, somehow." The painter felt
for the young fellow, but he could not help considering his
momentary agitation extravagant. "By the terms of the
bequest there are three members of the Committee. One
must be a connection of the Feydor family, with artistic
tastes, if obtainable. The other two must be professionals,
a Dutchman and, when possible, a foreigner of distinction.
I am the Dutchman this year: as foreigner we have our
friend." He indicated the Frenchman, who was flirting, a
few paces off, with the cigarette-smoking Sidonie.

"Be sure to get your conditions right," he added, "I will
send you a copy of the rules. We artists are such improvi-
dent creatures. Oh, I know!" He raised his eye-brows.
He spoke in a low, sad tone, as if his words, as he went along,
called up hidden images of regret. And his quiet face, in
repose, looked such memories, memories of pity and sym-
pathetic pain.

"The Bequest is one of the chief reasons of our coming
here," he continued. "The man who represents the money
is always important. But our host is, I hear, a notable
amateur? I am quite anxious—by the bye, Mevrouw Pareys
showed us two landscapes before dinner—yours?"

"Yes." Lis bit his cigar

"They have merit."

"Thanks. I know they are horribly bad."

"They are not horribly bad. Even that would be much
more satisfactory than the golden mean. They are—
pardon me—like school compositions, say in the sixth form,

influenced by the master, of a boy who may become——" he broke off, and sipped his liqueur.

"Prognostics are dangerous," he said, smiling, "of a boy who may become a successful journalist, or an admirable poet. There's no saying. He will get the technique."

"You are much too good to me, much too good," said Lis in a broken voice.

"By no means. But I didn't like the talk at dinner. It is true that none of us can prophesy whether promise will fulfil itself: it is quite untrue that we who have worked could meet with promise and not recognise it. Haven't you anything else you could let me see?"

The conservatory was hot, in spite of its wide-open doors. The bright evening was still hot outside. "I've got a whole portfolio of sketches upstairs," said Lis suddenly. "All done in the last dozen days." He rushed away to get them. He would show them in some solitude. He heard Yetta's laugh—doing its best—from the boudoir, with the child whom her care-taker brought in for a few moments after dinner—Redempta. People dined earlier in the country then.

When I is returned, empty-handed, he found the smokers grouped around his pastel, which the Baroness had instantly sent for. It was placed against a mass of pink and blue hortensias that would have ruined the colour scheme of a Christmas Plate. "Oh, not as bad as that!" Odo was saying. He hawed! There followed an eloquent hush.

"I think that it makes me ugly," pouted Madame de Rossac.

"It could not do that," replied the magisterial Maëstro, "but I should not call the impression pleasing." He fell back. "Wrong method. Bad school. And no talent," he hissed into Raff's ear. He imagined that he whispered. The words carried. Lis caught the last two.

"The costume is a mistake, but it is cleverly handled," said Raff: he drew Lis away with him. "You have more soul than I gave you credit for: you have flung the worst part of that woman's into her face. You haven't done

enough portraits, but it's an immense advance in originality. Shew me your new landscapes. He's right, of course: portrait painting ought to be learnt in France."

"The things are gone," cried Lis, in great agitation. "Some one's taken them. I can't find a scrap."

For one instant Raff doubted: then he felt ashamed of his doubt. "You will find them to-morrow," he said soothingly. "We don't leave till ten." They had come out among the orange-trees. He studied his cigar. Yetta called from her window. They strolled up to it. Before they reached her side, Jacob Raff laid a briefly detaining hand on his young companion's shoulder. "My lad," he said, "you possess, and are possessed by, what the outside world calls sneeringly 'the artistic temperament.' Don't allow it to make you suffer more than you can help."

"Imagine!" said Yetta, "Redempta had never blown bubbles. Do you remember, Lis? But she is not so poetical as you." She flung up a soap-ball: the little girl crowed with delight.

"Lis, do you know, I believe what first drew you to this child was her beautiful bruises!" She began hastily to tell Jacob Raff as much as she could crowd together of Lis's youthful art-leanings. "Don't!" protested the victim. "There goes a fine bubble! But I really liked the smoky ones best. I have never met any one who could do that again."

"I can do it," said Jacob Raff, and he did. "No, not pretty!" said the little girl. They all laughed. "She is right," remarked Raff, turning away. "But so much more like life!"

Job appeared in the boudoir. In his drawling dialect he announced softly that Mynheer was waiting for Mevrouw and the gentleman in the big west drawing-room. Yetta rose. The woman drew away the sadly gazing child. "Come!" said Yetta. Her eyes sought those of Lis with such a look of searching pain, the artist followed, wondering.

Exulted accents met them as they entered. The great

Frenchman was holding forth. His beautiful syllables rang out like bells. "Superbe! Magnifique! Admirable!" He called to his colleague on the threshold. "Come here, then, and see! It is wonderful! Madame, let me make you my compliment! But sinful, but sinful to keep these things hidden! That is over now. I have unearthed you, Monsieur!"

All along one side of the great white and gold saloon, facing three windows, were arranged against the panelling the sketches and drawings of the Boldam heath by Lis Doris. In a place of honour stood the pictures of Sunrise and Night. Only the work of that afternoon, "Heat on the Heath," was missing.

The French artist took up one after the other, held, turned them to the light. "It is that!" he repeated. "It is that! You have seized it. La blondeur rose des terrains! Le gris lumineux—argentin—ah, it is that!" He caught up another sketch. "What say you, Jacob? It is that."

Jacob said nothing, but he looked the more.

"Madame, I repeat—I make you my compliment on the genius of your husband. Ah the pity of the dilettante! Why must he not work like me"—he smiled—"for a living? We will show these in Paris! We will get him a medal!"

"Nonsense!" said Odo, half frightened, much amused.

Yetta gazed at her husband. Lis slipped back into the shade.

"These are yours?" she said. "Since we came here, you have painted these?"

The question in her voice roused him: it carried him through.

"Of course, they are mine," he said querulously. "You need not show everybody, Yetta, that you've never credited me with anything good."

"I have credited you with much, or I had not married you," answered Yetta, faltering. "I admit that I didn't

know about these. Was that my fault?" She turned away, but Lis sank still farther into the shade.

"Not one of them is signed," said Jacob Raff.

"No, that seems to me so pretentious, to sign things one keeps in one's studio. Don't you agree with me, Lis?"

"I have only signed the two pictures I sold," said Lis. He leant against a corner, but his voice, though low, sounded clear.

The Frenchman looked up from a sketch of withered broom. "You must sign some of these for me to take away," he said to his host. "I am not asking too much? You must let me prepare for this autumn, when you return to Paris, a little exhibition, say at the Mirlitons."

The Baroness clapped her hands. "I will get everybody to go," she cried. "You will be a Parisian success. The Maestro will praise you. It will change your whole position. You will be quelon'un! My dear Yetta, I congratulate you. To be quelon'un in Paris is the most delightful position in the civil world!"

"You will like me to be somebody, Yetta?" said Pareys, watching her. "You know every woman loves fame in a man!"

"To be somebody. To do something," answered Yetta slowly. "Yes, I should like that. Of course, it is pleasant to be proud of one's husband, Sidonie."

"My dear Yetta, I didn't know you could be spiteful," replied that lady, bristling.

Yetta opened her eyes wide. "I had not the slightest intention." She could only look from one to the other, saying something for the sake of saying it, and seeming at ease.

The Frenchman held one of the best water-colours, a dip in a dell, before Odo with one hand. The other hand offered a stylograph pen.

Looking negligently round upon all of them, but longest and most carefully at Lis Doris, Odo took the pen and cut

his name in fine, cruel letters across the paper. "Voilà!" he said. The Baroness clapped her hands.

"Lis, why don't you show some of *your* work?" he said.

Lis gave no reply.

"Why don't you show some of your work, Lis?"

"I have shown all I had to show," said Lis, "but one picture."

"Then why don't you show that?" asked Yetta quickly.

"I can't find it."

Pareys laughed. So brightly, so unusually, Yetta listened in astonishment. The Baroness, the Maestro, the yawning Ryk joined in.

Voilà!"

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XXVIII

"WHAT do you mean? What do you want? How is this to end?" gasped Lis.

"I don't know. I admit it is a curious beginning."

"For God's sake, lay your cards on the table, Mynheer Pareys! Let me see, at least. Let me know. Let me understand."

"If we are really to come to business, you must drop your voice."

"Answer me—that is all! Your joke isn't a joke. I can see that."

"Do you know, I think it was a joke, to begin with. I cannot myself quite make out, why it left off being one."

"It has left off. That is enough for me."

"Let us walk into the open. I dislike these dark bushes. I dislike the dark." They went back a few steps, to the gravel. The air was heavy with the scent of the orange-blossom. Great bars of light streamed from the house. The Baroness was singing, in a harsh contralto, sentimental songs about never having loved.

"It is but a very few hours," resumed Odo, smoking his eternal cigarette, "since you stated that you were willing to bestow on me your heart's blood."

"You answered that you didn't need it and already you have taken it."

"You do not distinguish between a cut in the finger and a stab through the heart. However, I admit that it was high-handed to send Job into your room to steal all your paintings. I suppose the one you've kept was on the balcony? He is so stupidly literal. Like the Chinaman

who reproduced the model trousers, plus the patch. You remember ? ”

“ Oh, my God, you are a bad man ! ” cried Lis.

“ No, I am not that. I assure you, I am not that.” Pareys spoke with what for him might be called fervour. “ Why should you say so ? I am only a man who likes to amuse himself, and I am willing to pay for my amusements.” He sighed. “ Nothing is more difficult to get in life than a little amusement,” he said.

“ You should not find it so,” Lis answered bitterly, “ for you do not mind the cost—to others.”

“ Nor to myself. But this has come up suddenly, against my will, as it were. You saw how naturally it developed. And now, I will not deny that it is an amusement. It diverts me, as nothing I can remember—and I am old—did before. With a little more philosophy it might divert you too.”

“ I was never a philosopher,” answered Lis. “ How is the play to end ? ”

“ Like real life : comedy or tragedy as you choose to take it. You will admit that we cannot go back on this now ! ”

“ Do you mean to say that you think I intend to call all my pictures yours ? ”

“ My dear Lis !—and a few hours ago you were ready to—but I will not be ungenerous. No ; I am going, as we now can talk business, to suggest that you sell me the right to these paintings—so far. The future is yours, with one limitation. An inevitable one.”

“ It seems you are really serious. I shall like to hear your offer.”

“ If you will allow me to say so, Lis, irony is not your style. It suits neither your open, handsome face, nor your kindly expression. But my offer you shall hear. I don’t think it will disappoint you.”

They took a few steps. Pareys, in the soft, dark night, looked up at the star-lit heavens, looked down at the lights of his house.

"My offer is the Feydor Prize," he said.

"Speak plainly"

"Why not? There can be no doubt, that the Feydor Prize will lie this year between you and one other man. So much we know already, from Amsterdam. I dare say you have guessed the other man's name."

"I have. He is a very good man."

"He is. You are a good man too. You heard our Frenchman's idea of your pictures—as soon as he didn't know they were yours. For I regret to say our Frenchman is immovably resolved to bestow his vote on that other man. He has seen his work, which is entirely modelled on the French line—the Barbizon school—the poetic glamour—the soul of the peasant and the soul of the peasant's sheep. He admires it immensely. I was quite astonished and taken aback by the way he approved of your very different Dutch method. I had certainly not expected it. All the same, you wouldn't have had a ghost of a chance with him! His mind is made up."

"Before he had seen anything!" cried Lis.

"Of course. You are new to competitions. His mind is made up, because he honestly thinks this man should have the chance, at all costs. And his impression, since he came here this afternoon, you will admit, wasn't favourable."

"Until he saw what I could do!"

"And thought you hadn't done it. Look at his opinion of your portrait. Portraits are his speciality."

"I suppose mine is pretty poor."

"By no means. Ask Raff. Now, Raff, as we can see, has made up his mind to patronise you. He considers your rival emotional and, above all, smudgy. The last, of course, is the unpardonable sin, with him. He swears by correct drawing. You are safe with Raff. Therefore the decision rests with me. You understand?"

"You put it plainly," said Lis. He supposed he was himself, talking about this matter, calmly, in this way. He must be.

"As plainly as you like. I will give you a written undertaking to-night—you see, how I place myself in your hands—that the Feydor Prize shall be yours, by my vote. The great gold Medal and two years in Italy! You will always be the man who won the Feydor Prize. You know what that means in this country. Your career as an artist financially assured."

"My pictures!"

"Ah, true, there we have my one stipulation. You must undertake never to paint landscape again, as long as I live. After me the deluge!"

"The Prize subject is heath!"

"Yes, hang it, so it is! You can send in the Haarlem dune, as you intended. It's heath or dune. You must finish it off in your early German style. I guarantee the prize."

"I have my picture upstairs that I intend to send in. I did a lot of it this afternoon. It is good," said Lis.

"I am sorry my conditions are unalterable, Lis," answered Odo coolly: he struck a light for his third cigarette. The flame glowed against his face. "You must leave me these things I have foolishly confessed to. Henceforth you must paint portraits, till my death. I shan't grow old. Even for that, if you like, I will give you a written guarantee—a doctor's certificate?" He turned to Lis, in the heavy dusk. "Well—as you prefer! In any case, you shall have the Feydor Prize. From the paint-box to the Feydor Prize! You will owe me no more hateful obligations. We are quits."

"I would not touch your Prize, now I know what you have told me,—not with a pair of tongs."

"My dear boy, you are so extravagant in your expressions. It is a remnant of—well, eh? Tone down, as you do your pictures."

"I am speaking my firm resolve. I shall be a painter yet, and earn my bread, but by fair means, not foul."

"And you mean to show your gratitude by splitting on

me?" For the first time there ran a real tremor through Pareys's studied tones.

Lis waited, certainly not from a desire to prolong the other's suspense.

"What can I do? You have placed us both in an absurd position."

"Excuse me, I am waiting for you to do that."

"I cannot sacrifice," cried the tortured Lis, "my whole life-work as an artist!"

"No, indeed, but you can 'sacrifice' a few months of it. Shall we count up what I am paying for each sketch in cash, besides all the future and the fame?"

"Which I won't touch!" shouted Lis. "Don't you hear me? I can't undo the past, but not a brass cent will I owe you in the future!"

"When people feel their remarks are silly, they shout them!" replied Pareys.

Maddened beyond control, Lis lifted his hand. It was but a threat: at the same moment, however, the arm was caught in mid-air.

"Let go, you stupid," commanded Pareys. The servant, still half hidden in the gloom of the bushes, obeyed.

Lis turned and surveyed the great, gliding creature with withering scorn. Not that the creature withered, but it slipped back.

"Are we to speak as man to man," said Lis, "or in the presence of your dogs?"

"It was you who called him, not I," retorted Pareys coolly. "Let us walk back into the moonlight." Lis followed after him.

"I refuse," said Lis softly. "I refuse absolutely to let my life be ruined for a fancy of yours. I will tell Jacob Raff to-morrow that the pictures I have painted are mine."

"How will you prove it?"

"By showing him to-day's work."

"Which you said you couldn't find?"

"I didn't want to expose you before Yetta. It is still in my case."

"No, Lis, you will keep my secret—now."

"I tell you I laugh at your talk of obligations. I may have them to Yetta, not to you. For the lie it appears you care nothing; I do. I will not live it. I could not. I won't. No, I won't. What right have you to demand this mad thing of me? I won't. No, I won't. This conversation can surely end, Mr. Pareys. I leave this house to-morrow with the others, after having told them. Not brutally: you may trust me. You will tell them yourself that—it was a joke." He had spoken with quiet certainty. he moved away to the house.

Pareys did not go after him.

"You admit your obligations to my wife," said Pareys. Lis stood still.

"I shall not say it was a joke. On the contrary, I shall tell the whole tale. I shall confess that I tried to make you sell me your name."

Lis spoke. "But your object?"

"I have never cared what people thought of my character. Life is unbearable to the man who does. But it seemed to me that Yetta rather liked the idea of a little praise—eh?"

"You will spare her the *esclandre*, then."

"Why? What is the use of that, if I cannot obtain for her the little satisfaction?" Pareys lighted another cigarette.

Lis stood musing.

"She is miserable, and you know she is miserable," he burst out.

Pareys crushed his match violently under his heel. The movement was almost like an oath.

"You are absurd, and you do not know you are absurd," he answered angrily. The retort was by no means in his usual taste.

"Pardon me, I painfully realise my absurdity. It can only be increased by my speaking plainly, yet speak plainly

I must. Very plainly. In a few words: Are you doing this for your own sake, or for Yetta's?"

"How can you separate husband and wife?"

"Answer me, in God's name, here to-night. Are you doing this for your own sake or for Yetta's?"

"You pretend to know me. Your lack of admiration is based on your pseudo-knowledge. Am I the sort of man who would care to be famous, for my own sake?"

"She will soon enough understand——"

"Let us hope not: that will depend largely on you. Well, I will be frank" — his voice thickened with annoyance — "we have not been very successful as yet. It seems to me, as if to-night we stood before a new departure. Give us a chance, Lis. There, I can say no more."

"God knows I would do anything, anything for her," stammered Lis. "You will be good to her; that is what you mean, is it not? You will be kind to her: you will help her. She will be proud of you, in Paris. We need never meet again." He broke down. Odo's everlasting cigarette dropped from his lips: he had bitten it through.

Lis flung back his head. "But I'm not a fool," he said. "I too have my condition, my *sine qua non*. I will do anything you like, if you dismiss the man, Job."

"I cannot," said Odo curtly.

"Dismiss or not, as you choose. But you send him from your house. You undertake that he shall never again find himself in the same place as your wife and yourself. If I hear that he has been seen there, I am released from my engagement."

"You are not accustomed, my dear boy, to negotiate with gentlemen." But Odo remained cigarette-less.

"I am not. I am not accustomed to gentlemen at all. You are my only experience."

"Bravo, you sledge-hammer! Lis, do you mean this foolish talk?"

"I offer you my terms. Accept them, and I will hold

my tongue. I am buying as much happiness for her as—as I can manage. I would it were more."

"'Sdeath!" said Odo. The oath had come at last.

"It'll be more than I think—a great deal more! She loves you. She married you. She'll be proud of you. Oh, be good to her! Be straight with her. Drive away that——" Lis stopped. "No, what's the use of epithets?" he said.

"I must consider," said Odo. "Perhaps you will come to your senses over-night."

"I have given you my final reply: nothing will change it now," answered Lis. So they parted. It was Odo who strolled back to the house.

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XXIX

LIS remained in the hot night. He lifted his hand to the hair that lay clammy on his forehead. Painter-chap though he was, or wanted to be, the hair was cut short enough behind. The Baroness had bluntly told him that he ought to get himself up more like an artist. "You don't look a bit like an artist. I don't believe you are one," she had said.

Perhaps she was right, he thought. Right in so far that he didn't know how to act in a properly artistic manner. He laughed cruelly, at thought of Pareys in the part.

"Our host is really an admirable painter," said a quiet voice at his elbow. Jacob Raff stood beside him, small, with a big cigar. Jacob Raff, at least, looked like the artist he was. Not because of any conventionally pre-supposed untidiness, but simply because of the inherent art-suggestion in the man's movements and bearing, and his quietly observant face. His eyes had the unmistakable artist look, unmistakable, when you know it should be there!

"It is the greatest surprise of my life. You come to a common-place country house: an amateur asks you to look at his work; you submit with the usual ill grace. And you discover a genius."

"I beg your pardon?" said Lis, turning red in the dark.

"You discover a middle-aged genius."

"It does seem strange," admitted Lis—to say something.

"Strange isn't the right word," answered Raff with a voice that had lost its sweetness. "It's scandalous. Is

there so much genius in the world that we can afford to waste it on amateurs? This man should have been twenty years farther. His work is young work still."

"Isn't first work often the best work?" asked Lis tremulously.

"No. Don't believe it. Certainly not in painting. Young work has its own charm. I don't say the later is always better—by no means—but it's always different. We can't spare the development. This man, through his wealth and dilettantism, has remained stationary. Have you really seen *none* of his earlier work?"

Lis sought for utterance: he felt that every sentence was complicating his position. "I have seen some," he said cautiously, "many years ago. It was very different."

"He tells me he gave up out of pique, at something his wife said when they married. And he only began again here, by a sudden impulse, to convince her she was wrong."

"Ah!" said Lis.

"It is quite an idyll. But idylls don't suit with methodical work. Women don't. An artist who is wise doesn't marry."

"I am in touch with you there," said Lis. "You didn't marry."

"She wouldn't have me," answered Jacob. "I am very glad. Now. All the same, if you meet some very charming creature,—don't be too wise." He heaved a sigh. "A wife is a great help to a portrait painter. Especially two or three. Look at Rembrandt and Rubens. You will paint finer portraits than your Baroness. Yet she's thoroughly alive."

"Do you think a man's method could so change that his earlier work would no longer be recognised as his?"

"Certainly I do. Change! Look at the way two of our own greatest men are changing at this moment!—Israels and Jaap Maris. They will develop a third manner, if they live. And look at Varahnyi!"

"I'm afraid I don't know about him," said Lis humbly.

"You young men don't study the story of your own art! Varahnyi got into trouble with the Salon: they excluded him. He was a 'genre' painter,—interiors: he stopped dead. A year later he began painting flowers—flowers only, in masses—he came here for the tulips. He changed his 'coup de pinceau' entirely, slapped down his paints flat instead of in thin lines as formerly. He sent in the pictures under the name of his mistress, who bore an assumed one. *That* betrayed him, ten years afterwards, when both he and the mistress were dead. You surely have come across his flower-pieces: he signed them Baraud?"

"I have only been to Düsseldorf and to Munich. I should have thought the same personality would have remained recognisable?"

"Not till it has found itself. Not if it changes its subject as well as its manner. Not if it breaks away from a master. Varahnyi was a young man: the Barauds are his real work. Now your pastel has curious affinities with Mr. Pareys' landscapes. He tells me he taught you. It is very extraordinary. But you will get away from that."

"I am glad you think there is something in my painting," said Lis miserably.

"I do certainly, in the portrait. Honestly, I did not care much for the Achenbachs. You won't be offended? I mean well. I should advise you to stick to portraiture. The Baroness is a great advance on the landscapes."

"The subject is heath!" said Lis suddenly.

"It is. You must just do your best. I heartily wish you success."

"Mynheer Raff, I am going to ask you a question I have no right to ask," said Lis.

"You can do so as long as I have the right not to answer," retorted the artist coolly. "Better not, though, perhaps. Why spoil my pleasant impression?"

"Because of the terrible importance of the answer to me," said Lis.

"Oh well, of course, if you speak in *that* voice! Is there anything in this short life *quite* worth that voice, my poor boy?"

"I want to know, if it is absolutely certain that I shall have one vote against me, when the time comes."

"Now, that really is a question you have no right to put."

"I feel that it is, yet I think I have a certain claim to an answer. For in that case I should not compete."

"What nonsense! What vanity! You have still two other votes."

"I thank you: you have answered me," said Lis with an effort.

"Indeed, I have not. You misunderstand. You have still two possible votes." Jacob Raff's tones could show heat, as well as fervour.

"I know I might have none, but in no case shall I have three."

"Do you demand unanimity? Do you expect, all your life, universal approval?"

This tone from this man was more than Lis, even in his present wretchedness, could endure.

"Don't," he said. "Don't, please. It isn't that at all. I'm doing my level best."

Jacob shrugged his shoulders, for that was his way of showing he felt sympathetic and helpless.

Things are happening in this house which I don't understand," he said. "How could I? Why should I? Now I am going to say something I have no right to say. It seems to me that Mynheer Pareys has helped you with your portrait or—for reasons best known to you both, you have helped him with his landscapes." He held up his hand. "Hush! Don't let's say anything more. One word may be hopelessly too much—unless you say all! Good-night. When you want me, come to me, at the Hague. I shall like to do something for you, if I can. I dare say I can. We must help each other, for we have the whole world against us.

They despoil us. We are everlasting children at their mercy. Good-night." He was gone, without a final shake of the hand, as if he were afraid of another touch, or look, or word.

"It has its compensations!" said Lis Doris between his set teeth. He spoke the words to a dingy nymph, who stood, eternally contemplative against the rhododendron bushes, clothed in her own chill marble. The nymph looked endorsement, although he had not particularised the "it." Possibly art *has* its compensations, even for the nymphs it leaves out naked in the cold.

It was late—near midnight: the house still stood lighted: the Baroness had stopped singing. In the silence Ryk Donderbus could be heard knocking about the billiard balls, probably by himself, presumably sulky. Lis went and looked through the windows: Ryk saw him and called out. By a supreme effort of good nature Lis entered. There's nothing like a game of billiards to steady one's nerves, he thought.

"She's a d—d dirt," remarked the ingenuous Ryk, playing as brightly as usual. "She's got hold of that d—d Frenchman. She wants me to sit by and look miserable. I'm d—d, if I do." The dashes with which the youth's conversation was dashed may henceforth be dashed out. But little of that conversation need be given: it was marvelously same.

"You're not in good form to-night," he said presently. "Had an extra glass of my brother-in-law's champagne?"

"I like his champagne. It is good," said Lis. He watched Ryk's careful stroke.

"So do I. But I dare say I can stand more than you. Habit. Your mistake, Lis, is to live as if you were poor, because you are poor. As soon as I discovered how poor I was, I realised what a mistake that would be. It is apt to be a life-long one, when made early."

"It is not my business to inquire *what* you live on," answered Lis.

"I will tell you, all the same—steady, man!—the income of my debts."

"A good joke," said Lis politely, hot, shaky, wishing he had not come in.

"By no means. The money I owe brings me in fresh supplies. I would explain further, if it wasn't casting pearls before swine." Thus spoke Ryk in his expansiveness, but, about midnight, he was frequently expansive, and then he usually served up the above remarks (sprinkled with dashes), from "living as if you were poor" to "pearls before swine." They were not his own. After them came fresh orders to waiters and more risky stories. In this case, having spent a very dull evening, he procured another whisky and soda. The stories followed in due course. Lis, playing somewhat better, was not such a prig as to object to these, but to-night, in his sensitive mood, the funniest of them fell on his perception, like the smell of a butcher's shop. Ryk presently objected that his laugh was perfunctory.

"I can't help it: I'm not in a humour for laughing," said Lis.

"What's the d—d good of a humour that isn't for laughing?" asked Ryk. This wit put him into such a bright temper that he forgave Lis for not enjoying his excellent tale of the chorus girl's parrot which had got into a church. But he naturally said: "Oh, look out!" when Lis very nearly grazed the cloth.

"My brother-in-law has an excellent temper," said Ryk, "but that is a thing which no fellow would stand."

"It isn't grazed," said Lis shortly.

"So much the better. That's a nasty one, but I think I can manage it. Attention! Right!" He whistled softly, as he went on. "Wait a bit! Yes, he is good-natured. He doesn't mind letting me have money, in reason. True, I've got him some excellent horses" (O sancta simplicitas!) "Cheap." (O sanctissima!). "I can't understand Yetta."

Lis with a clear blow, drew back his ball to what was

really a brilliant cannon. "Bravo! Do that again," said his antagonist. "No, I can't understand Yotta."

"Has she complained to you?" asked Lis, his anxiety forcing forth words he would gladly have kept back.

"Not quite," replied Ryk, triumphantly hurrying up with his break. "But I can see that she plays at being happy. I can, because I've known her all my life. Of course. I'll tell you why. She don't laugh any more, like she used to do. She really had an awfully jolly laugh."

"That makes your game," said Lis, putting back his cue.

"Does it? So it does. Have another whisky and soda. The whisky's quite decent."

"No, thanks. I shall go for a five minutes' stroll before turning in."

XXX

"SHE don't laugh any more like she used to do" — even you stupid brute could notice that, splashing upon Lis's white thought of her the mud of his disapproving sympathy. It was the dread that had troubled Lis from the first hour of his arrival. He had waited to hear her, listened in the lengthening silence. "She really had an awfully jolly laugh." Oh, the sudden sunlight—once upon a time! —that broke through the heaviest clouds!

He walked away, whistling under his breath. Whistling "*Souvent femme varie*" till suddenly he realised what a cruel injustice were the words from his lips. "*Fol est qui s'y fie!*" He broke off in the middle. He walked towards the light that was streaming from the side window of the coachman's cottage. Often before going up to his room he came hither a couple of hundred yards from the house, and peeped through the latticed shutters straight at the little cot in the corner, where slept his novel, his engrossing acquisition, his live property, the child Redempta. He was not allowed to see as much as he wished of her, when she was awake. The coachman's wife had protested, to her mistress: she had threatened to give up her charge. The gentleman ruined the child's health and happiness, with untimely sweetmeats, excitements, and every form of indulgence. He was no longer allowed to come and put her to bed, screaming with laughter, bright-eyed, crimson-cheeked, stuffed. "Such a rumpus as never I sees!" declaimed the coachman's wife. "And one of my best sheets torn!" "Remember, Lis, ten days hence she will be in an Institution!" warned Yetta. He bowed his head, quite ashamed. "You are right. You

are always right," he answered. She smiled happily. Let it be an illusion! He was beginning again to believe in her, as when he himself was a little child.

So he looked in at the window, of evenings. A night-light shed faint rays over that corner. He could see the heavily shadowed form in its cot.

At this hour then, also, peering through the lattice, he beheld the dull flicker of the oil-lamp. The flicker revealed the figure of Yetta, in her white satin dress, kneeling, her arms flung forward, on the cot.

There was such an abandonment to misery in her attitude, such a response of misery in his temper, that he went round directly, almost unconsciously, to the door, and, quite conscious now of the foolish wrong he was doing, irresistibly pushed it open and entered the little house.

She turned, at the noise, with a startled, white face. "Oh, go away! Go away!" she said.

"Not at once. Let me stay one moment. Let me say good-night to the child."

"She is asleep. Oh, go away!"

"Only one moment. What does it matter? The people are in the next room."

"They have gone round to the house. It is one of the servants' birthdays. I promised to stay here for an hour. They may be back any moment."

"We shall hear them. Do you mean to say they know you are here?"

"No, no. I found a little slavey asleep on the table. I sent her off to her bed in the garret."

"The servants will go on till one," said Lis. "I often hear them, on my side of the house, when I lie awake."

"Why do you lie awake?" she asked quickly. She had risen. "What have *you* to keep you from sleeping?"

He laughed it off. "Why should I need more sleep than your servants? Most of us, they say, sleep too much."

"Do they say so?" she answered thoughtfully. "Surely

the night was made to sleep in. The night wasn't made to think in, Lis. No, the night wasn't made to think in." A scared look came into her eyes, a far-away look, into the dark.

"I must stay here," she said, "till these people come back. Do you go."

"Let *me* stay. You will be so tired, after this busy day."

"I am not tired. I am in no hurry to get to my room. I like being here. I could stay here all night,"—her hand touched the cot—"Yes, it has been a remarkable day."

He gazed at her without speaking, and he should not have done that. For a man may say many things that don't matter. A woman needn't hear. But great dark eyes that gaze sadly in the silence speak too straight, and too strong.

She could not look at him, and she could not look away. For a moment she stood trembling: then she steadied herself, steadily, stilled. She was robed in white satin, untainted, except for a bunch of red roses half withered, just under her heart. A rope of wan pearls hung from her shoulders. She stood, as she had stood facing her husband; her fingers played with the lace fan attached to her waist.

"Yes, it has been a remarkable day," she repeated tonelessly. And she checked herself in fear.

"I will go," he said, "at once. I will leave this place to-morrow—if you like. Why did I come?"

"You came because my husband wanted you to," she answered. She added bravely, "And I also was glad to see you here."

"But now you would like me to go away again?"

She paused. "Yes," she said slowly. "Now I think, perhaps, you had better go away again."

"I will do so. But before I leave you, you must answer me one question. You must answer it as you love the truth that is in you. You must answer so that I may take the honest answer away with me, and ponder it when I am alone."

"Tell me your question," she said: her colour came and went.

"What can I do for your happiness?"

He hurried on before she could deny him. "There must be something, and I must do it: you must let me. I have begged of you to tell me the truth. Oh, I don't pretend that I can make you happy. But, but, Yetta, we have known each other always, from childhood. You can't tell me you are happy. You've no right to. For I know you are not." She would have spoken, but he passionately checked her. "I don't ask about your happiness," he said. "I know I've no business to. I don't ask. I don't dare. I've no claim. But we've always been friends, Yetta. You've always been good to me. A deal more than good. You're my life-long benefactress. If there's anything I can do, I want to know. I want to do it."

"Yes," she said, her eyes away, in the dim past. "We have always been friends, have we not? Always friends. Don't speak about my being good to you. I don't like it. I have always—been fond of you, Lis. You were not like the other boys."

"You're my life-long benefactress," he repeated doggedly.

"Nonsense. You were interesting, Lis. You must be still more interesting in the future. I have always felt like a mother towards you. You must take a bit of motherly advice."

"I have come to offer help, not to ask it," he protested eagerly.

"You must work hard, Lis. As hard as you have worked here. You must go on working. Your career is to be my happiness, that you speak of, in the future, as it has been in the past. Your career is my amusement and my interest, Lis! You must be a painter—good and great, if you can! As good and as great as you can! You must give the world *all* you have got to give, Lis. Nobody can do more, but so few do *that*! You must do it! That you can do for my happiness!"

"You yourself don't believe in my genius!" he made answer.

Her fingers sought her fan. "How can I, when you won't let me see what you paint? Genius is a strange thing: it breaks out in unexpected places. You ask about my happiness? You want to do something for me? You can. Shew me, and Mynheer Raff, to-morrow, before you both leave us, all the work you have done here."

He started. She gazed at him, quite simply now: there was no after-thought behind the petition—as yet.

"You heard what I said about not having anything," he replied, a little feebly.

"Yes, but I understood you to mean nothing worthy their notice. Let me and Raff—Raff especially—judge of that."

"I have nothing at all," he said, gathering assurance.

She answered him only with a wide-eyed stare of astonishment.

"I have done away with the lot," he said desperately.

"Do you mean destroyed them?"

"Cleared out the whole show: there wasn't anything I could keep."

"I think you are very foolish and mistaken," she said with a touch of vexation. "You had better find the one thing you couldn't and not destroy that till he has seen it."

"You are angry with me. I couldn't help myself," he pleaded.

She brushed him aside. "You have always been absurdly sensitive and self-conscious, Lis," she said, finding strength in reproaches. "You will never achieve anything, mark me, if you wait till you are satisfied with yourself."

"I'm sorry I can't do the one thing you ask me to do." He smiled to himself at the inadequacy of "sorry."

"Do you know, now I think of it—there is one thing more." The child moved, with a child's heavy gasps:

Yetta turned: "Hush, little one, hush!" she said very gently, smoothing the coverlet. "Hush!"

"Mother!" cried the child, contracting her face, in horror and pain.

"Hush, Redempta!" She bent over the child, repeating the new name, "Redempta! Redempta! Dream of pleasant things: dream of present things: forget the past, child. Redempta!" It seemed as if the little girl heard the novel music in her slumbers. Her features relaxed: she drew a long breath of relief.

"They will find us here!" exclaimed Yetta with renewed alarm. "Don't you care? Not for me?"

"Tell me what the one thing is, and I will be gone."

"Ah, true! You must answer me and go. I had not forgotten, but I'd just as lief that you had. I don't want to ask." She laid her head on the pillow, close against the child, away from him. "These pictures of Odo's: you believe that he painted them?"

"How can you doubt it?"

"Because—because—" she leaped to her feet: she faced him: the dead roses broke off and fell from her corsage with a thud, "because his whole life is a lie. Because I have learnt to doubt him in everything. Oh, I've said too much this morning not to say more! The little thing—the one little sentence—I'd been keeping it back: why did you make me say it? Why didn't you go out just now and leave me with the child, the innocent child, as I hoped you would, as I prayed you would. I don't want to speak against him: I won't speak against him. I am to blame, I—far more than he! Why won't I understand him? Why won't I make allowances? He doesn't strike me. It's not true: it's absurd, Lis. Sometimes I've thought so, but I know it's a ridiculous lie. He's good to me. Good to me. Look at my jewels. Of course he has his tastes, and his fancies and his friends. And now he has painted pictures such as I never would have chosen to give him credit for. Wonderful pictures, they say—I couldn't look at them properly: I

was too dazed : I saw through a mist, without seeing. I have despised him, Lis :—oh, how can I say these things ? But it's only to shew you how wrong I was. How wicked ! Who am I to despise, as my father says ? Who am I to condemn ? And now strangers come and exclaim that he's a genius !"—The tears were in her throat, in her eyes, but she mastered them—"I've been living side by side with a genius and despising him, because—ah no, not because he was a fool !"

"Yetta, you mustn't wrong yourself ! You can't do it before me !"

"Oh, I could, if I were to tell you the whole truth," she said timorously. "You must hear it, the whole truth now—shall we ever meet again ? I have wanted to leave him—to escape. Not to be divorced, of course, not that ! I may honestly say I am not that kind of woman, Lis. I pity those who—I don't censure, but I can't understand. In any case I, who chose of my free will, have no right to bring reproach, for *here* it is still reproach, on my parents or on him ! That has driven me back to him, has kept me here. Yes, yes, I know I must stay by his side. I shall, Lis. And so now they say he's a genius ? Lis, we are talking together again—are we not ?—like two children. I shall try to be worthy of his affection. But, Lis, if he were playing a trick on me, were lying to me—Lis !" Her voice rose, not loud, but thrilled with emotion. "I should turn my back on him and go out into the desert, come what may ! If it were so, but it isn't so—is it ? I am mad, to-night—no, only mazed, distracted. He painted those pictures himself—who else could have painted them ? Of course, he painted them : did he not ?"

"Who else could have painted them, as you say ?"

"I had been thinking he might have bought them, but of course that is absurd. The whole lot, unsigned. For who would have sold them to him ? Not you ?"

"No," said Lis quickly. "I should never have sold him my paintings, be very sure of that."

"Of course not. And the French artist says no two

styles were ever more unlike than yours and that of these pictures." She looked anxiously at him.

"Ah, the Frenchman says that? Of course they are unlike. Were there ever two men more unlike than your husband and I?"

"And he has put his whole soul into it: I must try and find it. Just as you have reflected your honest nature in Madame de Rossac's mean face."

"Find the soul of the pictures in Pareys!" cried Lis wildly. "Find it there, if you can, if you care! Only be happy, be happy at all costs, Yetta! Don't look like that!"

"He has painted them, has he not? He has painted them?" cried Yetta.

"He has painted them," said Lis.

"I know it. I have wronged him more than I deemed possible. I, who was going to disgrace him for ever. I repent in sackcloth and ashes." She knelt by the bed, motioning him from her. He turned, not unwillingly, his white face and firm tread to the door.

But on the outside threshold Odo stopped him. "Shall we go in?" said Odo, "just for two minutes more?"

"You have listened?" cried Doris, recoiling.

"Excuse me—no."

XXXI

"WOULD it have mattered so very much," asked Odo, gazing from one to the other, "if I had?" Yetta had drawn a chair to the bed: with swift fingers she arranged her hair.

"It looks very nice as it is," said her husband smiling his evil smile.

Lis stood by the door. "You would have heard yourself praised very much," he replied. "By your wife."

"I am sorry I missed so rare an opportunity. Our connection, as I have always understood it, is one of mutual indifference, neither praise nor blame. She must have been feeling very displeased with herself, to find praise for me!"

"It is true," said Yetta. "I was saying that I often wronged you, Odo."

"A strange time of night and curious surroundings for a wife to make such admission. Usually the idea occurs later." Both his hearers remained silent. "Don't you agree with me?" He held his head, airily, on one side.

"If you intend a joke, I do not see it," answered Yetta. "The hour is advanced as you say. I cannot understand that these people remain absent."

"I think I can explain that. I sent them back."

She sat straight on the chair. "Do you mean to tell me that you made an exhibition of me before your servants?"

"By no means. I only made an exhibition of you, if you like to call it so, before Job."

"You do not call him a servant?"

"Hardly. I call him what one calls every house-dog—a friend."

"Lis, you hear him!"

"But one does not take every friend—to be a house-dog," added Odo, his gaze on the flickering light.

"Lis, you hear him! It is thus he insults me every day, intangibly. When I take up the insult, he says I have made it mine."

"Are you continuing my praise in my presence?" queried Odo.

"Mynheer Pareys," said Lis, "I am leaving to-morrow. It probably will be a long time before we ever meet again. Your wife is my oldest friend, my only life-long friend. Make her as happy as she deserves. She knows you better, and therefore perhaps think of you more kindly, than I."

"Mynheer Doris—" began Pareys haughtily, but he stopped, for thought of the unsealed contract with Lis. He turned to his wife. "My position is an absurd one," he said, "I am praised by you, I understand, behind my back, and scolded by your oldest friend here, your only friend, to my face. I must imagine what he said of me, while I was away. Perhaps it is as well I should never know. Neither what he said of me now—to you."

"We were speaking of your paintings," answered Yetta coldly, "Lis admires them—more than his own."

"Does he? That is good of you, Lis. But you were always modest. I am glad people like them, now I have shown them at last."

Yetta rose. "Can I go to my room now? I am very tired. Can you send your—Job for the others?"

Odo took out his watch. "They will be here in ten minutes. I knew I should not require more. My friend Job, to whom you have taken such a dislike, will not trouble you long. When we depart to Paris, which will be very soon, on account of the picture-show, I shall leave him here."

"I presume, Mynheer Pareys, that you can have no further excuse for detaining me?" interposed Lis. "Yetta, may I wish you a good-night?" He held out his hand.

"No," said Yetta. "Let us walk to the house together. Odo, you have said so much to-night, I am free, after a ten days' strain. Give me your arm, Lis! We will go."

Pareys stood in the doorway. The thick folds formed, one by one, in the middle of his forehead. "Your attitude is splendid," he said, "but you forget two things. The state of your hair and"—he pointed—"the snapped twigs at your waist!"

A flood of purple covered her face and shoulders. She fell away from both men. "You accuse me, then, openly at last?" she said, with almost a sigh of satisfaction.

"If so, who is to blame?" he cried. "How long are you going to flaunt me? Because I take life with a grin, do you fancy I can't gnash my teeth? I, at least, walked outside on the gravel and scrunched it, like a gentleman. I have no secrets. When I married you, I loved you. Why did you marry me?"

"You say true, you have no secrets," she answered sadly. "When you married me, you say you loved me—you call it love. Love! You played with me till you were tired of me, and then you flung me away. And now, indeed, you have no secrets. You share them with your wife and with your house-dog. I may stand by and behold how you 'love'!"

"You married me for a worse love than mine!" he cried. "For love of another! You married me to get money for Lis!"

She screamed aloud: and she threw herself forward, with outstretched arms, as if to keep the words from reaching Lis Doris. She was between the two: she shielded the painter, her weak hands upheld.

"Let him lie, if it pleases him to lie: what care we?" said Lis. The child, awakened by the scream, began to weep loudly.

Yetta stood for a long moment, in hesitation. She tore at the laces about her heaving bosom, her fingers entangled in the pearls.

"He doesn't lie," she panted. "Not altogether. But he tells only half the truth. Yes, I married you for money: I wanted money. I gave you fair warning: you cannot deny it. I wanted money for myself, in every way, to enjoy life, to be free from bondage, to have fine things. I married you. The least thing I could do for you, Lis, was to help you on a bit in your studies—it amused me: I was delighted. I am proud that I did it. You are still so young: you must push on! I married, and I have fine things. I am free from bondage. Oh hush, hush, darling: I am coming! I am married." She swept round, beside the cot. "I enjoy life!"

"If you have sold yourself for those pearls—once more, is it my fault?" questioned Odo.

Her right hand was about the child: her left clutched the necklace.

"I shall not cast them at your feet," she said in clear tones. "That would be foolish. I wear them as a chain. They are big, are they not, Lis? They are really quite heavy. They are part of the price. Part of the price."

"My God, have you no pity?" said Lis Doris. "Do you leave me standing here?"

"On the contrary, I bid you go out into the world, and become great, and forget me! No, do not forget me, but think of me only with pity—with anger, if you can. For the word I had to speak, I must say in my husband's presence, as he doesn't—*trust* us alone! Lis, I know, how you loved and slaved for your father. It was I killed him, Lis. I sent him to his death!"

"Yetta—Mynheer Pareys—she doesn't know what she's saying——"

"Oh, I know very well," she drew the child into her lap and fondled it. "Think of me—remember me—hate me, scorn me—so! I went to him. I told him he was in the way,

was spoiling your life, keeping you back! I don't remember the words!" She bent low over the little girl. "I drove him to it. You see what a headstrong fool I am—marring people's lives. Don't let me touch yours any more, Lis. Forget me. Forgive me. No, no—hate me! Despise me. Despise me. Despise me." The words died away in a murmur. She kissed the child.

"The people are coming back," observed Pareys: his mask was off. His voice and his manner were in pieces. "I can hear their steps afar off."

Lis advanced to Yetta. "Whatever you did—for me," he said, "was done in goodness and pity. All your thoughts for me have been kindness and help!" Then he also bent and kissed his little Redempta. "A child is a bond," he said slowly. "Not a chain." And he went out into the night grown ink-black under coming thunder, went without a word or a glance for Pareys.

The latter recovered himself somewhat. Enough to ask a little wildly: "What did he say?"

Yetta flushed slightly. She looked up from the dozing child. "Surely," she said gently, "you heard him?"

"Yes, I think I heard him. A child is a bond, not a chain."

They were both of them silent, listening to the leisurely approaching feet.

"You love him, Yetta." All the sneer and the gibe had gone out of Odo's voice.

"Yes, I love him," she answered yet more gently. "Not as you would understand love. You need not be jealous. He's a dear boy, and a good boy. I don't think it's any use talking. We must just go on, Odo, side by side."

He came close, and he also gazed at the child. She rose to replace it in the bed.

"I loved you in my own way," he said huskily. "I can't help, if it wasn't yours. My way's good enough for me, and for most men."

"Often," she answered, "I ask myself, if I have not

wronged you. You might have married .. woman who would have thanked you for her share of your love."

For only reply he caught her to his breast, as she struggled, and furiously, and fiercely he kissed her, on her lips and her eyes and her forehead again and again.

THIRD :

XXXII

LIS DORIS strode slowly through the deepening autumn twilight. The mist—

Fool, to deem the long day fades so quickly! Your hand on the reins! Fifteen years, at least, of strain and strife and faithful service lie between the fervid summer midnight and yon calm November dusk. We hark back for a moment—a moment only!—to the crash of a life's aspirations, in a storm of human passion, brief, sudden, complete. Lis Doris stood among the ruins, quivering, with set brow.

A few hours after the farewell by the child's bed-side he left Aldervank. He did not see Yetta again. Far more gladly would he have avoided Pareys, but this proved impossible. The master of the house, his inseparable henchman still beside him, waylaid his departing guest, with evident intention, at the top of the great staircase. "Are you going with the others?" said Odo lightly. "They've had breakfast outside."

"Yes, I'm going," answered Lis gravely. A sleepless night doesn't show much in a young man, who has been able to wash after it. Pareys, no longer young but undisturbed, inquisitively inspected his rival, his victim, his protégé.

"You mustn't hurry away like this," he said smiling. "I'm glad I met you. Here's my part of our contract," he drew two envelopes from his breast-pocket and held

them out. "One is my pledge to secure your future—the—*the Feydor Prize*, you know. And the other is a little—ready money."

Lis Doris stood and looked at the man. He felt that the whole scene was biting itself into his memory for ever. The delicately carved white staircase; the broad corridor, with its oriental splendours of colour massed against the quiet French woodwork; the flood of sunlight and heat from the tall window on all the luxury and beauty, on the smile-less smile of my lord's face, on the grin-less grin of his dog.

"You see how entirely I place myself in your power," said Pareys.

Lis Doris slowly took the extended envelopes, and, as they touched his fingers, he saw the faintest flicker of contentment die away in the rich man's pallid eyes. The watch-dog watched.

Very slowly, almost thoughtfully, Lis opened the top-most envelop and perused the duly signed and attested undertaking of Odo Charles Pareys, that the Gold Medal and *Prix de Rome* of the Feydor Bequest should be conferred on Cornelis Doris. Attested, for the servant's scrawl spread under the master's arabesques.

Still more slowly he crushed the paper, closely, to a tiny ball, and dropped it at Odo's feet. And with a swift jerk he tore the other envelope across, unopened, flinging the two pieces into the servant's face.

The great brute caught both in one huge hand and simultaneously bore down resistlessly on his assailant, prostrating him on a Turkish carpet that slid along the polished floor.

"Wh-eet!" shrilled Pareys. His henchman let go. The combatants rose to their feet. Job stood drawing a deep breath or two, then calmed down suddenly, emotionless as ever.

"Mynheer Pareys, perhaps you will permit me to leave your house!" cried Lis, his tones as white with passion as his face.

"By all means," replied Pareys, "especially as you

have to catch a train." He moved aside from the stair-head. "You can kick that scoundrel first if you choose," he said.

"Thank you. I must get accustomed to leaving scoundrels un-kicked," came the answer, already from the first turn in the steps.

Pareys hung over the gallery-balusters, raising his voice. "Job, you miscreant!" he exclaimed. "Your temper's unsafe! When we go back to Paris, I shall make you stay here!"

On the way to the station, and a little beyond, the older artists endured the troubled silence of their companion. They were not sorry, when the train split in two. The great Frenchman, full of his host's wonderful health-effects, desired only to lose sight of the uninteresting young student. "Vous dites qu'il ira loin?" he said wearily to Jacob. "Je veux bien. Aussi loin que possible!" Jacob grasped for full five seconds our young friend's reluctant hand. "Work," said the great painter. "Work. And again work!" He dropped the hand. "For it's worth your while," he added.

The most disagreeable thing about the best advice is our small desire to follow it. By the time Lis Doris had reached his humble room on the "Buitenkant"—the "Outer Quay"—at Amsterdam, his one anxiety was to lock the door upon everybody and everything. He tried—a hard try! a vain try!—not even to remember himself. For days he sat in that top room—small, square, empty, with the still outlook on stored vessels, wide water, pale sky. He slunk down to his meals with the Loksters and slunk up again, answering, when spoken to, avoiding eccentricity, shunning all intercourse. "He is painting something great," said the Loksters to each other, and to their art-friends. He sat for hours, with his elbows on his knees, staring at his painting-things without seeing them, staring, without seeming to observe it, at the last great picture "Sunlight on the Heather" in its oil-skin cover, hid away. He touched nothing connected with his work: how could he? What was he to paint?

Portraits. The one form of his art for which he had always felt a special inability. Certainly he would not venture to compare his inaptitude with the great Ruysdael's refusal to draw a living shape. But he yearned to reproduce the ever-new beauty of the landscape. Human faces, shiftily with human frailties, palsied his touch. Ever since he had seen what Franz Lenbach has achieved, even in our day, by rough mastery of the dead, unforgotten Dutch.

No, he wanted to paint nature, not the social mask. Besides, a portrait, to pay, needs a sitter; and the sitter and the sitter's family say the picture isn't like. He got up to gaze out of the window, down from the height, at the forest of masts, and the green haze, in the far distance, of land, water and cloud.

Old Lokster, the drawing-master, stood awaiting his dinner and alternately calling to his wife, in the kitchen, and to Lis, in the garret. All the children stood waiting too. In whatever direction their artistic developments carried them, they all made a point of coming home to feed and to roost. Between the cries, which the children took up in a melodious discord, old Lokster read them out scraps from a daily paper. A daily paper, but not the paper of the day. Old Lokster was equally poor and proud. The baker round the corner, an Arminian, not averse from good works, wrapped up the morning loaf in the former morning's newspaper. He did so as a compromise, that old Lokster might no longer come in of evenings to inquire about the news, for the baker's politics were not the drawing-master's, and the baker's doctor had agitated the baker's consort by telling her that the baker must on no account continue to shout himself purple in the face. Therefore old Lokster now got his information somehow, a little stale, in peace. That a whole newspaper should be needed for one loaf, he set down to the rich baker's extravagance. When the bill got too inordinately long, the paper divided. Once old Lokster protested. "It isn't *cleanly*," he said, querulously. "Half a newspaper! Supposing the boy were to let it fall?" "Keep calm, my

dear. Remember the doctor," quickly interpolated the baker's stern wife.

"Old" Lokster would not have approved of the epithet. Every one tacked it on to his name. His long hair was white, but his cheeks, in spite of much hunger, were ruddy: his spare little figure was upright. His pride kept him from all money-complications: these he left to his wife. His lessons were horribly inexpensive. "Art," he said, "is unpayable," and he asked you to settle with his wife. That lady sent round the bills the very moment they fell due. "Art is eternal," said old Lokster. "I feel as young as when I first drew a ship." Ships were his speciality: that was why he dwelt, cheap, on the Buitenkant.

His father, also a drawing-master (with a pigtail), had christened him Paul, after the famous delineator of the bull. "He died young," complained the son, in a funk, when he realised his great prototype. "So may you, my Paul," calmly replied the long-piped ancient, "if you paint an immortal something first." "The cow is poor," he added, "the peasant pitiable. The young bull will never be surpassed." "He might have done still better, had he lived," suggested Paul. The old father put down his pipe to take snuff. "Not so," he said, "The bull is unsurpassable. When a man has done his best, he may just as well die." Paul Lokster therefore contentedly grew old without painting anything immortal. He might have suggested that his father had done the same, but his was not the age when sons said rude things to their fathers.

His own eldest he named Peter Paul. "Two patrons are better than one," he said, "Rubens painted immortal works all his life long, and prospered." Peter Paul Lokster didn't prosper, but he took after his homonym in deeming that life was a thing to enjoy. He was the black sheep of the family, an insufficient genius amongst the talents.

"Lis!" cried old Lokster, turning a page.

"Lis!" cried all the children, clinking their knives against their glasses. Lis opened his attic door.

"Prince Bismarck affirms that the peace of Europe is assured," read the father.

"What piece?" demanded one of the children, a flabby one, a wit.

"Alsace-Lorraine," replied another, a thin one (like most) and a wit too (like all).

"Mother!" shouted the father without looking up, from the window.

"Mother!" shrieked the children, tunefully from the table. The bread-soup and the lodger came in together. The lodger took the bowl from the hot house-wife's hands.

"Lis," announced Lokster, "here is an extraordinary story in the paper, about a new great Dutch painter in Paris! The queerest thing is that you'd never guess his name."

"Then I may as well not try," replied Lis, steadying the soup-tureen.

"Yes, you must. It's somebody you know well who lives in Paris. You don't know so many Dutchmen in Paris."

"Some student friend from Düsseldorf or Munich?" suggested Mevrouw Lokster.

"It is Odo Pareys," said Lis quietly. They all cried out at him—how had he guessed?

"How could it be any one else?" answered Lis. "Let me see the paper!" He hid behind it, reading our own correspondent's description of the little show at the Mirlitons. The correspondent grew eloquent in his echo of foreign laudation. French criticism had greeted with enthusiasm these highly poetic studies of northern heathland, done almost entirely in three tones, pink, amber and silver. "*Le fond argentin de l'atmosphère,*" "*la blondeur rose des terrains.*"

He laid down the paper. "Oh, no, thanks; no more soup," he said. Mevrouw Lokster, too poor to satisfy her children, always wanted to overfeed the man who paid.

"Judging from what the fellow writes, I should say the work was mediocre," remarked old Lokster, hungrily accepting, before a dozen hungry eyes, his extra spoonful.

Lis eagerly wanted to know why.

"Because it gets such praise," opined the eldest pale, thin daughter, Saskia.

Her father struck the table with his fist: that was the one utterance which impressed them all in their manifold art fads and fancies.

"Don't talk like a quack failure!" he said fiercely. "Leave off copying Kate Greenaway, and see what they say to *your* work! Lis, surely you must have seen a lot of this stuff, down at Aldervank? Why didn't you tell us about it? What a queer chap you are!"

"I haven't seen anything that Pareys has done for years," answered Lis, gulping down some cold meat.

"Amazing! On the heath he does nothing, and in Paris he paints the heath! That is what makes me distrust his work. I don't believe in these foreign colour-motives. Painting à la Wagner. You mention the heath—pink and silver, there you are! It can be done in a studio on the boulevard."

"Lis will take some potato," said Mevrouw Lokster.

"All art must be observed," remarked Saskia, recovering from her snub. The children—the very youngest—greeted this truism with a hoot!

"Leave her alone," interposed the father, ignoring his consort's gestures. "In art everything that isn't a truism is a fallacy. Lis, up to the present century the French have only had one landscape-painter, and he wasn't a Frenchman, Claude Lorrain. What do they know of landscape?"

"Dupré, Daubigny——" began Lis, glad to leap away, into so vast a subject.

"Poems!" replied old Lokster with immense contempt. He began vehemently stroking his silver beard. "Pooh! I don't doubt this man produces poetry—eh? A Dutch Corot! I have no objection to their French poetry, mind you! As long as they don't put my Dutch heath into it. I've seen the most absurd Anglo-Dutch and Franco-

Dutch fishing-smacks. You'll allow, I hope,"—this with fine irony—"that at least I'm an authority on fishing-smacks?"

"I'll allow you're an authority on pictures you haven't seen," said Lis, forcing a laugh. All the children shuddered: they had their own opinions on every subject, but, then, they were Loksters, and Lis was not.

"Mark my words, Lis! Dutch heath must be painted by a Dutchman who has never come under French influence. It must be seen by Dutch artist eyes, that have never worn foreign spectacles. *You're* the man to try and do it."

"Don't excite yourself so at dinner, father," interposed Mevrouw Lokster. "You'll have one of your upsets!"

The old drawing-master brushed her aside. "You're the man to try and do it. Mind, I say 'try.'" He pointed with his fork. "From what I've seen of your student-work here, I should say: Get hold of a Dutch subject and dig your way into the Dutch heart of it, like the Dutchman you are. We've fields and cows enough, and I don't think your ships are—even as good as mine! I'm very disappointed, Lis—yes, let me say it now. I've been watching you. I'd hoped you'd come back from your native soil, after all these years, with a heart, and a pair of eyes, and, still better, a portfolio, full of the heath, your heath, this new wonderful thing, your painter's heath! What have you brought back to us? Nothing!" He gulped down a big glass of water. "That would have been a different heath from this thing phrased in French by a man of the boulevards—Pareys!"

"I think I'll go up to my room," said Lis rising. The door had hardly closed on him, when Mevrouw reproached her husband. "Every one could see the lad was ill."

"Nobody is ill who can eat," declared Lokster, looking round on his all ravenous brood.

"I wish I *was* ill, then. I shouldn't want more," said the flabby daughter, Hendrikje.

The mother paused, and placed a piece of meat off her own plate on Hendrikje's. "I took more than I want," mildly protested the mother, "listening to father. You should leave Lis alone: he's got something on his mind."

"I can't leave him alone!" Old Paul Lokster brandished yesterday's paper. "I can't bear to think he should be a failure, like——"

"Father, don't!" cried all the children.

"Like me," said old Lokster, gazing fiercely round.

All the children clasped their hands and shook their fists in protest. The mother flung herself upon her husband's breast. "The best of your works are immortal!" she sobbed.

"No," answered old Paul Lokster sardonically. "Every one of the children will die."

The smaller ones, anticipating this calculation, broke into frightened howls.

"Like me!" persisted old Lokster. "But it's not my fault. I was sent into the world to paint a better bull after the best bull possible had already been painted. Well, I'm a failure: I very wisely never painted a bull at all." He stroked his wife's hair. "Weep not, dear one," he said. "We are all of us failures. Every one, in art, is a failure who doesn't produce the very best. The very best is barely good enough. I am broken-hearted to think any one should be painting the Overijssel heath—and attracting notice—and that man should not be our Lis."

XXXIII

LIS felt that he would never put pencil to paper again. All men who create with their brains know the mood. Many with less cause than he.

He had still a few hundred guilders left of the purchase-money, which he now bitterly told himself he owed to Pareys. No, to Yetta. Surely she had bought his gratitude, and paid for it. As long as she lived, he must spare her the insult of thanking her husband for what she had done.

He left the last picture, tied up, in its case, against the wall. He felt that, if he could only untie that case and face that picture, he was saved. But, he couldn't. The picture remained there; it filled the room.

He got up and stood at the window gazing out on the great, silent East-Indiamen, on the moving small craft. The water glowed in the hot sunlight. Down below, a long way below, on the quay an American lady art-student was painting, molested, as usual, by street-boys. Lis went down and across to the little place by the water and, because he was square and strong and determined, he drove the street-boys away. "Oh, thank you," said the stranger resignedly. "But they will come back."

"I might get a policeman," suggested Lis, in uncertain tones.

"Oh, thank you. I had one, when a boy threw a splash of dirt over my picture. I'd caught the boy." She laughed sadly. "He said he could do nothing. He said the boys were allowed to do that."

"I know," admitted Lis.

"And a gentleman who passed, and who spoke a little English, like you, said as I was a citizen of a Great Republic I would understand that one mustn't coerce youth. He said 'squeeze.'"

"I know," repeated Lis.

"We squeeze them in my Republic," continued the fair American, nodding. "We squeeze them pretty hard I did. He cried out, and the gentleman said to me. 'Mind, or you'll be imprisoned.' So I squeezed him again and let him go."

"The gentleman was probably a magistrate," remarked Lis.

"The gentleman was certainly a fool," replied the American. "Those boys are looking round the corner."

Lis went forwards to them, wheeling, as you do with a dog. He told them that he lived within sight and that he would give a guilder to the tallest boy, the red-haired one, if the American finished her painting—long or short—in peace. He pointed out his front-door. It was a degrading transaction, but no hero can fight twenty thousand street-boys with the law on their side.

The American, who was not young, imperiously called him back to her. "You paint, yourself," she said.

Lis hesitated. "I used to, but I've given it up," he replied.

"Nonsense! At your age! I wish I had your chance. I began two years ago. What do you think of my work?"

"It's very nice," said Lis.

"I see, you don't like it,"—she was, and remained, offended. "Well, go on, and paint better! Paint as well as Van de Velde."

"I can't do ships," said Lis. The quay was very hot and white: he wanted to get back to his dark room and re-read the newspaper about Pareys.

"Stop a bit! What *can* you paint? Do you know a good man who does ancestors?"

"Ancestors!"

"Yes—a man who would go and paint one's ancestors for one?"

"No," replied Lis with decision. "There'd be plenty of light, I dare say, but the climate's too hot."

She turned to look full at him, brush in hand. "My!" she exclaimed. "Were you born here?"

He did not answer for, like most Dutchmen, he believed his nation to possess a keen sense of humour.

"My name's Nassau," continued the paintress, with an eagle glance at the watchful boys. "The royal family of Holland, you know. Nassau. I don't say there wasn't a bar sinister. That sort of thing can't be helped in families like ours."

"It increases the interest," said Lis.

"You are a sensible man," she replied, with a shrewd pinch of her lips. "Well, the museums here are full of them, my ancestors, I mean; and I'm going to take half a dozen of the best-looking home." She dashed a few smears of grey across her sky. "Poppa's good for half a dozen, if I can get 'em cheap," she said.

"I should take William the Second, the Stadholder; he's the handsomest," said Lis.

"I'm supposed to resemble him," answered the fair American.

Lis's silence was possibly assent.

"Well, do you know of anybody, who would undertake the half dozen—our selection—say at fifty dollars a-piece?"

"I am thinking hard," replied Lis.

"Or sixty for the first, if we didn't care to go on?"

"They couldn't be done under a week per head," said Lis. A steam launch across the water shrieked: Miss Nassau put up her hands.

"My friend would want ten dollars more," suggested Lis, "for everything below the breast."

"Does that include knees?"

"Yes, but not feet."

"I should have to ask Poppa about that."

"And I shall have to ask my friend. He may refuse altogether. Will you be here to-morrow?"

"Yes. I am staying at the Doelen Hotel. I should have to see his work. You don't look to me a good judge of painting."

So they parted; and Lis gave to each of the three staring boys a two-penny bit as an earnest of things to come.

He had resolved fiercely within himself to do this thing, to paint these vile daubs at so much a yard, and pack them off and pocket the pay. Three hundred dollars is a lot of money, when you've but a very little left. That was what Art meant, in real life: drudgery, copying, lessons to a grocer's child. Unless you were a genius, like Raff, or an amateur, like Pareys.

He told the whole story that evening at supper, to all the Loksters—he told it, amused and ashamed.

Father, mother, and six children cried out.

"Fortunately you can't," said father Lokster quietly, spreading his butter, thin, on thick bread. "Your prize picture won't leave you time."

"I'm not going to compete," answered Lis. Mother Lokster struck a dish against a glass, chipping both. Such a thing had never been known to happen before. Lis's tone admitted of no further discussion. "So be it: go and copy Nassaus for an American Sausage King," said old Lokster. "No, Hendrikje, you can't have any more!"—he pushed away the sausage (American) from the flabby daughter's grasp.

"I'll ply my trade," retorted Lis angrily, "like——"

"Me," interrupted old Lokster.

"Others," said Lis. He thrust back his plate.

"You don't eat, Lis: you've quite lost your fine appetite," put in the mother, "since you came back."

"The food was different up at Aldervank, isn't it?" suggested Peter Paul, the eldest, the only one of the family who scowled.

"Lis isn't that sort," angrily protested the Mother.

"A man who loves art doesn't care what he eats,"

declaimed old Lokster severely. The children all knew that theory. They had been brought up on it. They bent their young heads over their empty plates.

"Art satisfies," continued old Lokster, looking round for approval. "Art etherealises, sublimates, the Appetite! As a student, I have often gone into the Museum, empty, and come out, filled."

"Looking at the painted lemons—and the lobsters?" proposed the eldest, with his tongue, but not pleasantly, in his cheek. Hendrikje sucked her bit of sausage-skin.

"It is the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Do you think those thousands really swallowed endlessly multiplied lumps of material food? Surely not: their bodily hunger left them as they contemplated the Saviour, for they were satisfied, sated, with the Divine." Old Lokster's gaze rested, lovingly on his worn and weary spouse. "I think," he added softly, "to-day is a day for dessert." "Dessert" was half an hour's extra delay and study of a few good engravings, such as the Rembrandt portfolio, a present from Lis. "And also, I think, a glass of punch?" hazarded old Lokster: his voice and his eye were full of hope. Mother Lokster rose, jingling her keys. In a moment the whole family were squabbling shrilly over the light-effects in the "Presentation in the Temple," which Hendrikje, in spite of her Rembrandt-*esque* name, had audaciously challenged as "wrong." The handsomer Saskia, no less Rembrandt*esque*, protested, appealing to Lis.

But Lis pushed the beautiful engraving aside, almost roughly, and left them—the whole eager, hungry, refined babel of art-lovers under the paraffin lamp. "Read us your refusal!" old Lokster called after him. "Put it neatly to the Nassau—sage!"

"Oh, father,"—in a general hubbub—"that isn't good!"

Lis climbed up to his garret, feeling his way. The rickety old house, propped somehow between two others equally narrow and sloping, seemed to lurch like a vessel as you steadied yourself on its theoretically perpendicular stairs.

It was one of those ancient Amsterdam sky-scraper (the sky hangs low on the lowlands), with a dozen single rooms one on top of each other, not very straight in floor, walls or ceiling, and a ladder, twisted at clumsy corners, going up alongside. Awkward to dwell in and ugly to look at, the tall pile of pigeon-holes had been lovingly decked out by deft hands in the course of more than twenty years. There was carved wood-work along the ladder: there were plaster vines round the crooked ceilings, brass tulips on the shaky doors. The low boxes, like cabins, opening out from little landings, unexpectedly, were cram-full of personal work, and artist-souvenirs. Old Lokster had been distanced in life's race by many student-friends who loved him all the more for that. He was only a teacher, who painted rather crude boats. He had no Sanctum. All over the house were scattered sketches, signed by more or less famous names.

Lis stumbled up among well-known and avoidable bric-à-brac. His own room was bare enough. He sat down in the dark.

In the light, for the full moon stared straight through the panes from the dark-blue sky, a wistful, melancholy moon. He stared back at it, his chin on the palms of his hands. He liked the idea of trade-work for honest pay. Better any time than the tricks of "Success."

Peter Paul broke in upon his self-complacency. He preferred the company of the moon. With our usual selfishness, for the moon talked to him about Lis Doris, and Peter Paul Lokster talks about Peter Paul Lokster as a rule.

"Look here, Lis: have you written that letter?" P. P. Lokster was the only one of the family who, having least talent and a bad temper, posed artistically. With a fine contempt for his prosperous and genial name-sake, he wore his hair long, in Vandyke droopings, about his thin grey face.

"No: why? Oh, don't bother me: I'm going to accept," replied Lis.

Peter Paul established himself across a table-corner in the

moonlight and produced a cigarette. "I'm in time," he said. "Non-sense: you're a genius. At least, so father says. Leave that work to lesser lights."

"Are you come up to preach clap-trap to me also?" demanded Lis moodily.

"I am not. Preaching anything isn't in my line. Preaching usually is clap-trap, isn't it? I've come to talk sense. You ought to let me have that money."

"Do you too want me to paint pictures and call them yours?" cried Lis. The "too" escaped him.

Peter Paul turned in the moon-beam.

"Do you think I'm a cad?" he answered. He, the black sheep. Not yet had Lis felt the full weight of Pareys' foul play.

"I want to earn the money," explained Peter Paul. "Write to the American and recommend a friend."

"You can't paint well enough," protested Lis. "Your pottery designs are good—when you take pains."

"Thank you. Well, I shall take pains over these copies. Any one can do copies at fifty dollars apiece. I want the money."

"So do I," said Lis.

"No, you don't. Not really. You don't know what it is really to want money."

"A man wants money, when he hasn't got enough," said Lis.

"Just so. Then Rothschild wants money."

"I am using 'enough' objectively," explained Lis.

"D—— it, don't talk philosophy to me!" exclaimed the other. "A man wants money when he's got a Jew at his throat pinching him till he pays!" He flung his cigarette from him: he thrust his hands into his pockets: the table cracked.

"Is it as bad as that?" said Lis.

"Bad? It means money or——" he paused.

"Again?" said Lis. His pity was small for this man, in this house.

"Jail," said Peter Paul, brutally, in the cold glare of the moon.

They were both silent for a moment.

"I would rather not know any more," said Lis at last.

"Why not? It's much easier to copy another man's signature than his portrait. And it pays better, unless you're found out."

"Would you mind leaving me alone with the moonlight?" said Lis.

"Why? I would much rather talk over this little business with you than with—my mother."

Lis clenched his fists in the dark. "Yes, I suppose she is your mother," he said.

Peter Paul lighted another cigarette. "The doubt, when there is one, usually refers to the other parent," he replied.

"Peter Paul, you are out of drawing, in your family."

"Good God, Lis, stop fooling! Haven't you the sense to see what an agony I'm in? Do you want me to tear off the mask here—in the dark? I'm keeping it on as much for your sake as for my own! Do you want to hear the real voice? There you have it! Good God, you can save me: my life's hanging on a thread!"

"How much do you want?"

"More than you can give me. Five hundred guilders in two months. The Jew's got the forged bond."

"Fool!" said Lis. The word hurt: he should have said "Rogue."

"It's easy for you to talk: you've always had plenty——" the young fellow's voice was full of angry tears. "I do my best to struggle on. I *hate* money. There oughtn't to be any money, and there wouldn't be any crime. Property's robbery. The idiot who owns the Pottery Works——"

"You read too much," interrupted Lis. "When an artist turns to Socialism he goes off his head at once."

"Thank you again. Well, having abused me sufficiently, will you pass me on to your Princess of Pork?"

"But you can't do it," faltered Lis.

"I can, as well as you. Has father convinced you that you are the only genius in the house? You are mistaken. You will live to learn that *I* am the genius at number 212 Buitenkant. I!" He kicked the leg of the table. "I want money to develop my temperament. Wait and see!"

"To develop it in music-halls?" said Lis.

"You have earned the right to insult me," replied Peter Paul magnificently. "Pray did you never hear of the great Rembrandt's financial embarrassments?"

"Rembrandt!" Lis leaped to his feet: his voice rang out. "How dare you take his name on your lips? Rembrandt? The great, splendid worker, and struggler, and sufferer! Ruined and beaten down and honestly beggared by the same burghers who now babble of his pictures and boast of buying them, with stolen money, too dear! Rembrandt! 'His financial embarrassments' are his chiefest human glory. And *you*!"

"Who's talking Socialism now?" questioned the other sullenly.

Lis shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm done for, unless you help me," whimpered Peter Paul. "I'm willing to earn the money honestly, ain't I? And father says it'd be dishonourable in *you*." He began to weep outright.

"Oh, don't cry: I can't stand that," objected Lis. "Did your father really say 'dishonourable'?"

"Of course. Just like father. He's quite mad—and unjust—about you."

"I won't take money for what I *can* paint," said Lis gravely, aloud. "And I mayn't for what I can't."

Peter Paul of course could not understand this, but he never even pretended to display any interest in other affairs than his own. It is not always concentration on our own affairs that causes them to prosper. You can blow out a spark: you can also extinguish a fire, to your own detriment, by sitting down on it. Besides, so much

depends upon the quality of what we concentrate. Human Bovril is often but a weak concoction. And many a man who thinks he lights a spirit-lamp, extinguishes his little flares in a slop-basin.

All this only goes to prove that Peter Paul Lokster, in spite of his absorbed interest, made a mess of his existence. But to us, except in so far as we love his father, that fact matters little. Lis loved old Lokster: fortunately, the American lady, when Peter Paul carried her the letter of introduction, took an immediate fancy to the young artist's plaintive self-assurance and his Vandykian curls.

"Frankly, I should have preferred it to be the young man who rescued me from the street-boys," said the fair American.

"He can only paint landscape," answered Peter Paul, annoyed.

"And I don't want the country but the family," giggled Miss Nassau.

"Er ?—er ?—oh, I see," replied Peter Paul.

XXXIV

A YOUNG man soon gets tired of sitting alone with his own thoughts, especially when the moon looks in at his window. And if he be haunted by the new certainty of his father's suicide, he flies from the moon and silence to music and lights.

He had plenty of friends amongst the Amsterdam art-students. He spent his evenings—often half his nights—with them. In the day-time they painted, unlike him. His was quite a butterfly change from the worm-work of the long industrious years. Old Lokster gnashed such teeth as the hard crust of life had left to him. In spite of Mother Lokster's anxious warnings the pent-up torrent of old Lokster's protests too frequently poured past those teeth. Finally Lis carried off a portmanteau with his clothes to the house of a respectable widow—"A *respectable* widow! Oh, by the memory of your mother" (whom Lis couldn't remember) "I entreat you!" cried the sobbing Mevrouw Lokster. The widow was so respectable, that she objected to "Art." The only "artists" she had ever read about were variety performers. Theological students, she said, were her line. She locked her door at eleven and gave Lis three months' notice. Mevrouw Lokster dried her eyes. A box with all Lis's painting-things had been put away at number 212 Buitenkant. Lis wouldn't touch them.

Meanwhile Lis led what the respectable widow, and not the widow only, called a godless life. He described it as "having a good time, like other chaps," "being young at last" and that sort of thing. In the middle of it he got a letter, the first since their parting, from Yetta. The

morning that brought the letter found him with a headache. "You will have seen about my husband's success," wrote Yetta. "I am glad for him, and proud of it. It has done him a great deal of good, brought him into contact with interesting people, taken him out of himself. And your advice also was good, for he says it was your advice. We are alone. It was fine of you, like you, brave of you, to tell him. I am happy. Dear Lis, I trust you are. And doing well."

"We are alone." Lis knew, for he had found means to inquire of the Dominé, that Job was keeping the deserted house at Aldervank. "And I wish he were in Paris," said the Dominé. "There his sins do less harm."

It pained him to hear that Yetta was as happy as he wished her to be. He hoped she spake true, though he hardly believed her. He must write and say that he was happy also. Oh, and doing well, doing well.

He despatched his reply in the course of the day and went to dine with half a dozen boon companions, who carried him off to the Circus. After that was over, the whole party, more or less hilarious, accidentally tumbled into an obscure "Café Concert," of whose very existence Lis had hitherto remained unconscious. A performance was on—near midnight—a novel attraction: Living Statues. The place needs no description, resembling all others of its second-rate kind. It was full of smoke and gas-light and a smell of beer. The people at the little tables, talking loud through the jingle of music, were silent, when one sang.

The most turbulent of Lis's party inquired about the Statues.

"They're just coming on," replied the pert boy-waiter. He added: "The 'Veiled Venus' is the best."

"And who is the 'Veiled Venus'?"

"Nobody knows: that's the mystery," said the boy with relish. "This is her third appearance." As he put down the glasses, he continued: "She'll have to show her

face to-night. They mean to make her." Enigmatically nodding his sharp head down the narrow passage, he withdrew.

The Living Statues—pseudo-classical groups under lime-light—met with immense and immediate approval: the hall filled to see them. The Laocoon had to be shown five times. The greasy manager stepped before the curtain and explained that the small boy couldn't hold up his arm any more. He was greeted with salvos of applause and laughter. The assembly grew uproarious. The music struck up, half the audience singing its words—a waltz of the moment—about lovely blue eyes. The curtain rose on the last number of the programme.

The Veiled Venus stood immovable in her barely tinted tights on a slowly revolving pedestal. Her attitude was that of an Oriental slave, whom the merchant has left, for one moment, a thin muslin to shelter her face. The beauty of her figure was undeniable, but it was the beauty of a nymph, not yet formed. Slowly the pedestal turned, to the jingle of the music, before the swell and stress and laughter of the crowd.

"Shew your face!" cried a shrill young voice. The cry was taken up by a hundred others. "Shew your face! Shew your face!"

"My, how ugly she must be!" squealed a pink-faced woman. There was a lot of merriment over that. "She's got lovely blue eyes!" called a wit who had climbed on to a table. And the whole audience, to a man, sang, over and over: "Show your lovely blue eyes!" "Lovely blue eyes!" Lis sang with the loudest: "Lovely blue eyes!"

Closing time was come. The crowd surged, clamorous. The greasy manager—round, bold, bejewelled—stood on the stage and gesticulated to the Venus, to the singers. "We won't go, till we've seen her!" yelled the turbulent youth who had come with Lis.

The Manager, as the veil floated past him, suddenly twiched it away: it broke from her snatching hands with

an audible wrench. A moment's hesitation: then she gazed straight at the surging crowd.

The face, over the exquisitely moulded young shape, was an ugly one. Mealy, miserable, out of drawing, with turned up nose and protruding cheek-bones, distorted by the false light of the stage. The eyes were small slits. She half closed them. A chorus went up from the countless grinning faces opposite her, close to her, everywhere: "Lovely, oh lovely blue eyes!"

In that moment of uncertainty, through the haze and the horror, Lis had recognised—he was certain of it—Hendrikje Lokster. He broke away from his amazed companions: he was round in the wings, as the curtain descended on the hooting and howls of a horde of wild beasts.

"You wished it," said Hendrikje, as she came off, to the cream-faced manager.

"It was over anyhow. We couldn't keep it up. I have done with you," he snarled.

"Lis!" she turned, and began crying bitterly, as he wrapped her in her cloak. He waited for her, and took her away in a cab. "Oh, yes, to the Buitenkant," she said. "Stop at the corner of the Canal." As the cab rumbled through the dark, deserted by-streets she hid in a corner and checked her sobs.

"Well, it's over," she said at last.

"But why—what does it mean?" he questioned softly.

"It means—it means that father's ill—very ill—has been for a week. There isn't a penny in the house, and Peter Paul's away at his painting, in the Hague, and nobody'll buy Saskia's Greenaways. That's what it means, and the doctor won't come, unless we pay him his dollar down, each time. That's what it means, the daily dollar!"

"But how ever in the world——" ventured Lis.

"Did I get the work? Well, one had to do something, and an artist I knew suggested it to me—my figure, you see, seems all that I'm worth!" She gasped. "I slipped out in the dark: Mother's up in the room under yours

with father. Oh, what shall I do to-morrow, when the doctor comes! The man hasn't paid me. He never will."

"I have barely money enough in my pocket to pay the cab," said Lis. Presently he began again. "I'm stumped, Hendrikje. I haven't any money left and no chance of getting more."

"If I only had the dollar for to-morrow," replied Hendrikje, under the obsession which had driven her on the stage.

Lis reflected. "There's valuable work in the house," he said. "Other people's work."

"Nothing that hasn't got a dedication to father sprawled across it. Nothing we could sell."

"I suppose not."

"Besides, it would break his heart to miss anything. His house is his all."

"I know: he says he has paid for his treasures in hunger or love. I wish I could help you." The cab rumbled into the lights of the harbour.

"Father is very angry with you, Lis. He went into your room after you—ran away, and he came out, terrible, and said you were raving mad."

"What made him say that?" demanded Lis, alarmed.

"He said you were worse than mad. He said the man who hid his talent in a napkin deserved far less punishment than you."

"Ah!" cried Lis, guessing straight at once—that Lokster had unfastened the straps which he, Lis, dared not touch.

"He won't let us mention your name. He wouldn't allow us to go near you. I'm afraid I can't ask you to come to the house to-morrow. Oh, Lis, Lis!" The cab approached the corner: she began to cry again.

"Hush," said Lis. "At what time does the doctor come?"

"At ten, as a rule. He asks for his dollar before he goes up."

"You shall have it to-morrow at ten, but you must let

me into the house to-night." The cab had stopped: she walked a hundred steps in the twinkling desolation: she fumbled for her latch-key. "I want my painting-things," gulped Lis, in the dark.

They creaked into one of the lower rooms of the tall, thin house. Lis unpacked, with trembling hands, the jumble in his lockless box. He drew out a portfolio, tied with many bows, and, speaking kindly words of promise to the pallid girl, he left her. She crept miserably to bed.

A few hours later, in the early autumn morning, Lis, unkempt, flung his portfolio on the counter of a well-known picture-dealer. He had rung up the shop. The tiny old proprietor was accessible at all times to all men, in perpetual hopes of a—big or little—find.

"Unfasten the strings, my Raffaele, unfasten the strings!" commanded Bardo. He was thin and green, like a grass-hopper. He skipped and he shrilled. Especially were his eyes and spectacles like that insect's, as was also his wise air of knowing what's what.

"I don't want to touch the things," objected Lis. Old Bardo blinked at him. "Cranky, like most of them!" said old Bardo aloud. "I had Jaap Maris standing only yesterday where you stand"—Lis started—" 'Kees,' he said—they all call me 'Kees': you will when you are a great man twenty years hence" (Bardo was nearly eighty), "my Tiziano!—'Kees, all artists are just a bit cracked," said Jaap Maris. 'You needn't tell me,' I said to Jaap Maris: 'I've seen more of them than you!' or than you, my Leonardo." Whilst speaking, he nimbly untied an ugly knot or two. It was a queer little superstition of his, that the clatter of these immortal names might possibly wake genius from the dead. "Let us see these things: are they great?" he said, drawing out a sketch or two into the cold raw day. Lis shuddered. "No, they are not great," said old Bardo.

"I sold two landscapes a year ago at the Artists' Exhibition," ventured Lis.

"I know, boy. To Poppelmeyer. But it was a commission. And the worthy Poppelmeyer doesn't know the difference between a painting and a pot o' paint upset."

"Isn't there one of these you could give me a dollar for?" persisted Lis.

Kees Bardo smiled an unfathomable smile as he lazily laid one sketch beside the other. The counter was a long one: he walked up and down in front of it, his hands behind his back.

"No," he said. "Not that they're not worth it, child. But I can only buy what I care to sell again."

"Don't trouble to pick them up," said Lis. "Let your man sweep them out!"

Kees Bardo gleamed through his huge spectacles at the shabby, desperate-faced young fellow with the true artist-look. He knew them, the child-like, brave-hearted race. He drew money from them, but not blood.

"This closed envelope," he said. "Let me open that!"

"No!" cried Lis. "I forgot it was there! That isn't for sale!"

With one eye working down into Lis's soul like a gimlet, old Kees Bardo coolly inserted a skeleton forefinger under the flap and wrenched the envelope asunder.

He drew out the sketch Lis had made as a lad, in that unforgettable night, of his newly dead father. He looked at it carefully: he looked at it again.

"For this I will give you twenty-five guilders," he said. "You remember about Rembrandt and his famous etching of a hundred?"

Lis nodded. It was well-known that Bardo always quoted that etching, just as the publishers cite "Paradise Lost."

"It isn't for sale," said Lis.

Old Kees sighed contentedly. "Well," he squeaked, "'tis a pity. You can take the others away."

"Give me a dollar for one of them."

"Not a guilder. This," he struck the picture of the

dead man's face, "I can use. It is immature: it is full of faults, but it is startling: it is effective. Above all, it is alive—no, that's not the word—with feeling, with emotion. All real art has personal emotion, my Rembrandt, or my Rubens, if you prefer."

There was a long pause.

"Well?" said Kees Bardo.

"Take it, in God's name," said Lis Doris.

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XXXV

A FEW days later the great event of the artistic year took place. The Feydor Prize and Gold Medal were assigned to the only desertful competitor. His picture of "Wind on the Sand-dunes" hung in the Autumn Exhibition. Every one went to see it. The young man's career was assured.

Lis also went to see it, early one bright morning, alone. Lokster was out of danger, his family all tearful and prayerful around his bed. Hendrikje, unknown to her mother, sought employment as a model, in private. Saskia, accumulating Greenbacks, talked wildly about "selling her face."

The Rooms were fairly full, when Lis entered them. He hadn't read notices.

The first thing he saw in the Great Room, on the line, in the centre, face to face, was his pair of summer studies: Sunrise and Night on the Heath. Odo Pareys.

People were closing in upon them, and pointing from one to the other, discussing, describing, in an atmosphere of praise. Manifestly the sensation of the Show. Lis paused in a doorway.

"Excuse me," expostulated somebody, irritably pushing past.

The next thing he saw was Jacob Raff, standing, imperious, amongst the crowd. The great man looked up, recognised him, and, gravely smiling, beckoned. "I am not going to scold you," said Jacob. "I am going to praise another man." He jerked his rough mane towards the "Sunrise." "They are even better," he said, "than I thought."

"I am glad you like them," said Lis, smiling too.

"That is nice of you, for any one could see there was

no love lost between you and our host. He didn't care to hide his feelings and you—can't. But of course he was your benefactor: you wouldn't forget that."

"I don't," said Lis.

"Come round the rooms with me: I like to talk about the pictures. Lots of the talk is nonsense, of course, but I like it all the same." He led the way, stumbling, stunted, almost misshapen, in his rough clothes and broad wide-awake, and rough hair. Lis followed, straight and manly, well-dressed, in spite of his poverty. People turned round to look at them. "Jacob Raff, eh? You would know him anywhere." Women glanced again at Lis.

Gesticulating, elucidating, inadvertently informing, Jacob Raff passed from canvas to canvas. The Prize Picture he slurred over, with a glance at his companion that cut like a knife. "Good," he said, "of its kind."

They slipped into the little room off the main entrance, amongst the drawings. "H'm?" ejaculated Jacob, in questioning astonishment, so loud that an æsthetic youth in a corner, two bored ladies, a peering journalist, turned round.

Opposite the doorway hung, by itself, on a dark ground, the pale sketch of dead Simeon Doris.

Jacob Raff walked straight up to it, and remained standing there motionless till the other half-dozen people in the room had meandered out. Lis stood behind him, disgusted with his stupid self for trembling like the weak-fibred aspen. The man—the picture-dealer—had hung this holy treasure of a filial heart against the wall of a shilling exhibition for all the foolish crowd to look at and laugh at, filtering by. A painter might have known that to a dealer a picture was a possible profit, nothing more. He ought to have remembered: he ought to have conditioned—

"I wonder who did this," said Jacob Raff. "I can't find any signature: can you?"

"No," answered Lis, without advancing.

"You might take the trouble to look closer," said the master, with a touch of petulance.

"It isn't signed," choked Lis.

"The young fellow, then, is modest. It is very young work. And very good."

"You think it good?"

"Of course I think it good. Do you dislike my praising others, because I haven't scolded you?"

"I did it," said Lis, with the long gasp of a complete surrender.

"You—did—?"—the artist turned round and gazed cruelly at him—"What?—Do you mean that you drew this head? When?"

"Five years ago," said Lis.

Jacob Raff caught him by the arm, with a clutch that pressed the bone, and flung him down, almost falling himself, on a red velvet lounge against the wall.

"You idiot!" he breathed hoarsely. "You idiot! You idiot! You drew that five years ago, and nothing since! Nothing that counts. Nothing that means anything. Nothing better? You fool! You cowardly blackguardly fool! Oh, you cad, you cad, you cad! Don't scowl at me! I don't care a damn, if you scowl at me! You can hit me, or challenge me, or do anything idiotic you want to do! As long as I make myself plain to you. Are you sure you understand what I am calling you? You coward! you blackguard! You fool!"

"I don't want to scowl," said Lis, hiding his face in the unshackled hand. Only for a moment: then he fixed his eyes on his tormentor.

Very slowly, deliberately, the gentle Jacob Raff enunciated an oath. It fell strangely from his pinched lips: it hurt more than the violent outburst of the moment before. "I don't understand, and I suppose I mayn't understand," he said. "Have you promised some woman or devil, never to paint again, or always to paint ill?"

"You are almost a sorcerer," answered Lis with a bitter smile he strove to render a sneer.

"I believe there is some hideous secret between you and

Pareys. Hush. I don't touch your honour. I respect your silence. He told me he had wished to include portraits for the Competition; so as to give you a chance, he said! You were good at portraits. I had only seen that stupid forced thing of the French woman, and the two conventional German landscapes. But this! This!"

Lis shuddered, under the other's pressure. "Do you think it so good? It is my father. Done as he lay there. I didn't want to sell it."

"It is good as the work of a boy who has learnt little. Of a boy who can throw his soul into his work. And has got a soul to throw." He loosened his grasp and stood up. "You know that Pareys is here? Over for the Feydor business. He may look in any moment."

Lis sprang to his feet. "I can't meet him!" he cried. "I want to go!"

Jacob Raff, perusing the young man's face, drew his own conclusions. "Well, go out yonder," he nodded to the outer door, "and wait for me outside: do you hear? Kees Bardo is in the big room: I want a word with him first."

Lis turned to obey, but, in passing, he paused for a moment, before the dead face, with its closed eyes—he had closed them!—the stern face, intellectualised by suffering, grey and peaceful amongst these incongruous surroundings: the gay fruit and flowers, the street-scenes from Paris and Algiers.

"A very good likeness," said a smooth voice behind him. Pareys stood in the middle of the deserted room, leaning on the arm of Job Boonbakker. He looked older, with an air of weary cosmopolitan refinement. Perhaps it was the astrakan collar of his coat or the red ribbon peeping from a button-hole underneath.

"He was a fine-looking man, your father. By the bye, what did he die of?"

Lis looked deep into the other's yellowing eyes. "Of the longing to see me a great painter," he said.

Pareys's slender figure thrilled. "It is a pity he had to

wait for that till you drew his dead face," said Pareys with a pretty smile.

Lis clenched his fist, tight down, by his side, as he had done before with this man.

"We must put our trust in the peep-holes of Paradise," added Pareys.

"I pity you from the bottom of my heart," replied Lis Doris.

"Thank you," Odo put up a delicately gloved hand to his moustache. "But I am not here for more than a few days. I have been looking at the pictures in the big room. I suppose you have heard of their success in Paris? Undoubtedly, Lis, they have real merit."

The impassive Job nodded the slightest, imperceptible little nod of indorsement. Lis asked himself, with no new pang, how much did this fellow know?

"I have you——" he began in his halting French.

Pareys stopped him. "Job understands a little French," said Pareys. "Do you want him not to hear?"

"I have you at my mercy: do you mind his hearing that?" cried Lis hotly. "I have but to loosen a string, and you—drop."

"Job is accustomed to take my metaphors cum grano: he will doubtless appreciate yours."

"There is a picture of sunlight on a heath, Mynheer Pareys, between two boards in an Amsterdam garret, better than anything hung in yonder show-room, and signed with another name than yours!"

Odo turned pale under his shallow complexion. "You have broken our contract," he said with very real scorn. "Whilst I have faithfully kept to it." He pressed his hand on the servant's arm. "Job, I take you back to Paris with me to-morrow." The man's face was not impassive now.

"I have broken nothing. The thing was painted on the very day when this fellow took my pictures. He left it in the room."

Pareys, with one arm through his companion's, turned

and struck his free hand, clenched under its glove, full in the servant's face. Quickly as the deed was done, he had first assured himself, by a glance, that they were alone.

The big bully took the blow, without a recoil.

"It was hidden, tied up!" exclaimed Lis, his blood a-tingle with fury, and satisfaction, and disgust.

Pareys barked round at him. "How much do you want for the thing? Name your price!"

Lis crossed his arms. "My string holds—eh?" he said.

"I will pay you twice the price that has been offered me for one of those things over there: will that suffice you? At least I have never sold a single sketch: acknowledge that much. When I die, some day, I fancy I shall leave you all my pictures—they will be quite valuable by then! I had intended to ask you to paint me another picture, Lis. The world is beginning to question—to expect! But this is better." He withdrew his arm. "Go, dog, and dab thy cheek," he said. "Listen, Lis; I must have this picture. Do you understand me? I don't care what I pay."

"Do your little boys still work your furnaces, Mynheer Pareys?"

"Tush! I must have it by fair means or foul!"

"You will get it by neither," said Lis.

"The game isn't all play, I assure you. I started it as much for Yetta's sake as for my own. More. She thinks very differently of the famous painter than she did of the idle dilettante."

"I am glad to hear it. My string holds," said Lis.

"You refuse absolutely?"

"Absolutely."

Pareys slightly moved his shoulders. "So be it—for the moment. I hurry back to-morrow to Yetta. Believe me, she now-a-days almost loves me. All the artists in Paris are anxious to paint her beautiful arms, but she won't let anybody except me! Shall I take her any message?"

A couple of pre-occupied art-critics crept round the

corner, drawn towards the speaking silence of the dead man's face.

"Tell her I admire her," answered Lis, "as much as—but don't add that—I pity you."

The thin veins stood out, like elastics, on Odo's sunk temples. "But not as much—but not as much——" he stuttered, "as—I—hate—you." He flung round his back to his foeman and, not without a certain dignity, strode to one door, as Lis hurriedly fled through the other.

"I have waited endlessly: I have suffered tortures," grumbled Jacob Raff in the entrance-hall. Ensnared in a corner behind a newspaper, he had pretended not to be himself. "I should have waited twice as long," he continued. "Come at once!" and he called a cab.

"Where are you taking me?" Lis ultimately ventured to inquire.

"Do not ask. For once in your life show sense. Obey me, unconditionally, for the next—" he looked at his watch—"eight hours. After that be again the fool you prefer to be, alone!" The voice was so gentle, Lis fixed his eyes on the street. The cab crawled up a couple of round canal bridges and clattered over cobble-stones into a bit of old gabled and twisted Amsterdam street-scenery: bronze water, brown brick and bad smells. Here it stopped, on a narrow side-way, amongst green shutters and green-grocer's carts, with a lurch. Jacob Raff led the way through one of those dead doors which indicate a private entrance, up a long passage—"Here he is!" cried Jacob, to an old man who came forward to meet them: in the dim interior, after the brightness, Lis realised the hitherto unexplored back premises of Kees Bardo.

"Aha, my Tintoretto!" squealed the picture-dealer, shuffling and skipping.

"No nonsense, but show us the room!" interrupted Jacob.

The old man grumbled on ahead of them, up the steep staircase. "No nonsense, indeed!" he shrilled over the

balustrade. "Tintoretto painted fine portraits and—kept them *dark*!"

"Give us the things, as I told you, and leave us alone," said Raff, entering a large room with a north light. "Let nobody disturb us on any account, unless the house burns down."

"Maestro, to hear is to obey," replied old Bardo, bowing with mock obsequiousness. "My house is not heavily enough insured to burn down."

"Jew!" exclaimed Raff. "How much did you give this boy for his drawing?"

"I have told you already, oh greatest of the modern great."

"Repeat it in his presence, if you dare!"

"If the first Rembrandt had brought to its painter the present-day price of a Rembrandt, there would never have been a second Rembrandt," answered Bardo with a bow.

"You speak what you know not of, old Kees Bardo. That great artist-soul would have worked itself out, till the end!"

Old Kees Bardo laughed. "He was unique among painters!" With this Parthian shaft he withdrew himself from further awkward inquiry.

"Well, will you do as I bid you?" demanded Raff, standing in the big bare top-room, with the few painting-things lying about.

"I will do anything," answered Lis in a shaky voice, "for the sake of those last words of yours, and—and of all your other words."

Jacob Raff sat down in the best light, facing the sky, on the single seat, except a stool—a horse-hair sofa.

"There are crayons," he said, "draw my head!"

"But——"

"Silence! My head's a good one, isn't it? I'm always told so. Start drawing it! Pray to whatever gods you believe in—and draw, draw! We've eight hours of light at least! Draw—draw, I tell you, for the love of—of every-

thing you care about in this stupid world, or revere in the world to come. Do you know how short life is, you stupid? Don't stand staring there! Start! Do it as well as you can. Do it better! Don't let me lose my day!"

"You will lose it anyhow," murmured Lis.

"I have lost others. More than I care to count. Perhaps some day I shall be glad to count this."

"I will do what I can for—love of you," said Lis earnestly, "I—I——"

"I agree with you: I am quite a decent model. They say I let my hair grow so as to look artistic. But that isn't why I do it. Shall I move a bit to the left? So? I will confide the real reason to you, if you promise never to breathe it to a living soul. It is—hush—that I live in dread of the hairdresser. In mortal dread of the man who makes me buy oils. Oils I can't even use in painting, for I've tried. But they lie about me in the comic papers—look at my hands!" He stuck out two big red paws, the little lion-maned man—"they're clean!"

Lis had begun with trembling, slowly steadying assurance. He shifted his easel, selected his crayons, finding all he needed ready to his hand. The calm light filled the grey-walled room. In the silence street-cries sounded, and changeful rumblings, from far below. The rough, broad rub of the chalk and the frizz of the fingers ceaselessly alternating upon the responsive paper, told their monotonous tale of human effort, striving and straining at still, white heat. The quiet atmosphere was full of endeavour and encouragement and hope. For a couple of hours Jacob sat silent, biting back his recalcitrant tongue, trying to think of everything, or nothing, intent on one end only: that this "boy" should do his best! An admirable sitter, he realised every concession of pose or expression that the worker would hardly have dared to demand. Once only he jumped up, half-way, with a howl, and, stretching himself, ran forward to the easel.

"Don't!" cried Lis, half-protecting the unfinished smudge.

"I must. I can't help myself. I can't wait any longer." He looked carefully: his few words of authoritative advice were as so many turns of the helm to the port.

It was long past noon, when Kees Bardo fumbled at the door and apologetically squeaked that here was luncheon.

"True, I told him to bring you bread and meat," said Jacob. "I'll unlock the door, or he'll come in." Raff himself swallowed but a few gulps of coffee and a biscuit. "My abstemiousness isn't a virtue," he said. "It's a—vice. A vice in which I'm clutched by my—what do they call the thing?—artistic temperament! I can't eat and paint, both."

"But you aren't painting," objected Lis, his mouth full.

"Ain't I? I feel as if I was with all my heart and soul." He loitered along the room with his hands in the pockets of his (too short) trousers. "Never talk about your artistic emotions, my—what's your name? Lis! Every word that we utter about them sounds ridiculous. But never ignore them to yourself, for that's not a bit of good." He flung himself heavily down. "Having your portrait done is much more fatiguing than doing one," he sighed, "but that's ungracious! Let's get to work again. You've eaten enough."

"My appetite's come back with the work," laughed Lis. "That doesn't sound like the proper emotion." He was happy, with flushed cheeks and bright eyes: his heart sang. He leapt up and caught at his crayons. And again the whole chamber filled with the glow and the tension, the quiver and the flame. At moments the charged atmosphere grew almost unbearable to the elder man: he spoke.

"You must come to the Hague," he said.

"I should be only too glad to get away from here."

"Just so. And you can copy the portraits in the Maurits Huis. There was a young man there all these last days,

doing the Nassaus. Doing them atrociously. I advised him to stop and go and do something else. Anything else. I said it most courteously. But he advised *me* to go to the Devil." Jacob laughed. "Such absurd advice! Besides, I don't intend to follow it. When I cross the ferry, I shall ask to be locked up in the heavenly picture gallery. Surely such a Grand Seigneur, with so many mansions, has a picture gallery. A divine one! What a place! It is the only refuge in which I can imagine eternity endurable."

"Will any of the earthly paintings be admitted on the walls?" demanded Lis.

"Perhaps not. But one or two of the earthly painters. I fear even they will have to improve. They will have unusual facilities. *Vita brevis!*"—he sighed.

"The young man was a son, it appears, of old Lokster," he began again presently. "A failure in the future as his father was a failure in the past."

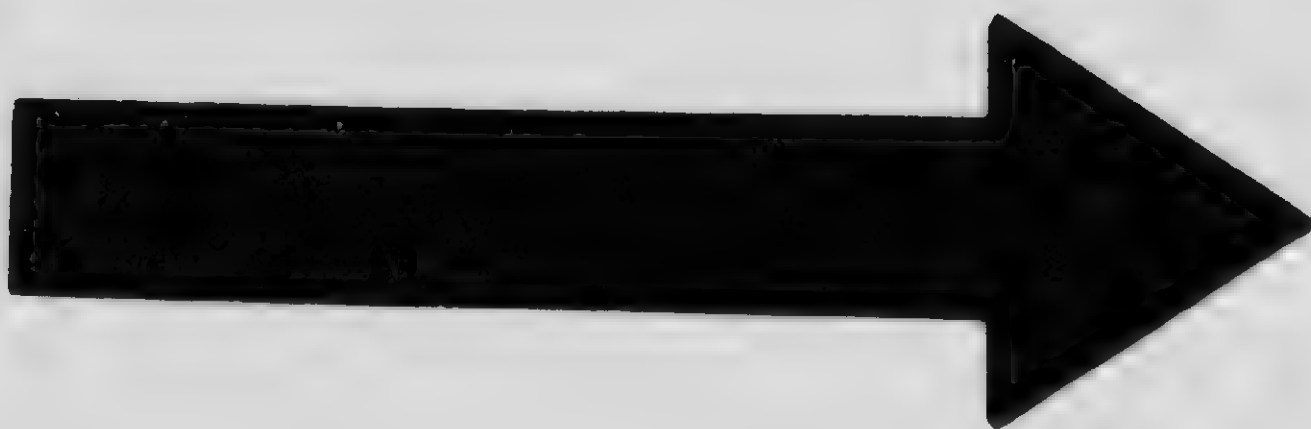
"The father is a good man," said Lis.

"Most failures are," retorted Jacob, roughly. "Mind you! Mark!"

"Don't, please!" said Lis. "He is ill and very poor, and I'm awfully fond of him."

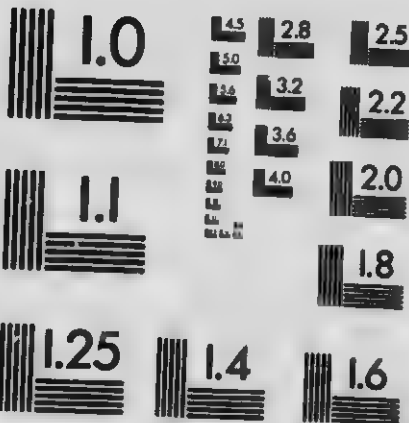
The Maestro sprang from the sofa. The shadows were closing in.

"Your drawing is good," he said. "It is very good. You have made immense progress in technique, of course. It would have been perfectly mad and absurd and insane, if you had not. But in this thing you give again what you'd lost in the woman's portrait, and that was what I wanted to find out about. The woman's portrait was a copy of a woman: this thing in its way is—I'm sick of the word—art. You can telegraph from your soul to your fingers an individual message for them to utter. That's all. And it's enough. Come to the Hague, and paint portraits. I will see that you get commissions, my son!"



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XXXVI

CHARITABLE to his own advantage, Kees Bardo, having swiftly purchased Lis's whole portfolio cheap, went about everywhere saying he had paid a long price for it. As a reward for this "réclame" he first endeavoured to negotiate a treaty with the young painter for half a dozen figure pieces—in the future—at a fixed price. He came away from the colloquy mournfully shaking his keen head. His hideous old wife was interested in Lis, for she had met him, the other day, on the stairs. But Kees Bardo answered her roughly.

"Not Apollo, but Mercury," he said.

"You can't expect to cheat them all," mumbled the sympathetic Mrs. Bardo.

"I can," replied old Kees. "And I do. But not always. I have cheated him."

Without malice, however, he repeated widely what Raff had said, and not said, about the new artist. He thereby sold the contents of the portfolio with great profit. The sketch of dead Simeon had passed into "unknown hands," luckily for Bardo, before Lis was able to offer a hundred guilders, with threats and cajolings, to re-acquire it. "A hundred guilders!" wept the dealer, and lifted eyes twinkling (with tears?) out of Lis's eager reach.

Possessed again of a little ready money, the latter found himself able to pay off lenders and pawnbrokers: he drew a long breath. So did the respectable widow, whose keen scent of evil had long detected the impecuniousness of her uncongenial lodger. "No more mountebanks for me!" said the widow, as she snapped her purse on the last paid-up half-penny, and departed to Meeting. Her divinity students

demurred. They had found Lis diverting. The widow, who had a flaring picture of "The Broad Way and the Narrow" in her parlour replied sharply that "diverting" was the word.

On going to take leave of the Loksters, Lis found the atmosphere of that household chilled. Old Lokster had always been the king of his home and of its hearts: the king's countenance was changed towards his whilom favourite. The lord of mantiloquence curled his lip and said the young chap was that worst thing but one in the wide Art-world: a man that could and didn't. The family acquiesced. When, very much later, the fact had slowly penetrated, through clouds of prejudice, into Lokster's brain that Lis was earning an honest living by portrait-painting, he curled his fat lips still further and said that now, then, his young Hopeful was become the worst thing of all: A man who could far better than he did. Beyond this he wrapped himself in enigmatical silence and head-shakings, too kindly to abuse a former friend. Old Lokster, during the hard fifty odd years of his struggle, had always doggedly done all he could and mourned that it was not, and couldn't be, better. "One moment of genius!" had been his futile prayer—he knew it was futile—as a boy, as a man. Ah, he remembered his first cry of it, out into the night, from the garret of his father's school-house, when the District Inspector had said he should study for a drawing-master! He did not know it was futile then. Now he was grey-headed, worn-out, this latest "upset"—the beginning of the end—had left him very shaky. He had lost, long ago, faith in prayer, or hope from life. He believed in little beyond the supreme glory of the Sister Arts. Science was to him a dead wall: he passed by it without seeing it. The artist soared: the scientist grubbed. He still liked talking. And he loved his wife and children with equal unreason: he had killed himself, before his time, in their support.

For, although he took a couple of years to disappear,

his day was over, when Lis came to say good-bye. He was feeble and tottery: he sat in his arm-chair and couldn't find his words. Nor would he let you help him: there were long pauses, during which he searched for the word he wanted. As often as not, later on, it was unintelligible when found, but any suggestion of error infuriated him. His pupils naturally dropped away to healthier men. His children sat round the table, working, if possible, and waiting for that next word. Peter Paul was as good to his father as any of them. But P. P. needed, as Lokster had never done, much money for himself.

Lis found them so seated, as often as he came. On the first occasion—the leave-taking—the great table was newly cleared. Its shabby green cloth revealed the patient sufferings of years, but never before in its age or its youth had that cloth borne the proud weight of a flimsy scrap of paper such as now lay exposed to all eyes. All eyes indeed were fixed upon it. "Beauty is beauty," remarked Mevrouw Lokster, "but I never saw anything so beautiful in my life before."

The scrap was a bank-note for one thousand guilders.

"To think there should be so many more of them in the world!" Mevrouw Lokster clasped her thin hands. "D'ye believe there might be another on this Canal?"

The husband and father smiled. "At the banker's!" he said. "Surely! Lis"—he had bestowed but chary notice on his visitor—"Lis must have some punch." The young man knew better than to raise objections.

"It cuts up so small!" sighed Saskia. Lazy (comparatively), handsome, dejected, she kept her eyes on the bank-note. As did all the others.

"Jacob Raff sent it," explained the invalid. "He seems to have heard of old Lokster!"

"From Lis—eh, Lis?—when you met at Aldervank?" suggested Mevrouw.

"No—oh, no: we didn't speak of you at Aldervank," prevaricated Lis.

"I told you so!" cried old Lokster, relieved, to his spouse. All the children nodded.

"We have never accepted money from anybody!" he continued. Mevrouw blushed guiltily and glanced away from Lis. "But this is different. Listen what he says!" Every evening, since it had come, a week ago, the bank-note was solemnly laid on the table after tea. Twice at least, in the course of his oration, the father read the letter aloud.

"It'd be a pity to cut it up on old debts," said Peter Paul. As of a sprinkle of water on a great heap of dust. Peter Paul (whose friends, not his relatives, had known him to order champagne!) was incapable of believing his parents, when they averred they had always honestly paid their way.

"Silence, and attention!" cried old Lokster.

"My dear Sir, I hear you are not well. Will you let me lend you the enclosed, until you care to repay it? On the other side of the ferry, if we meet?"

The old drawing-master laid down the half-sheet of note and looked round.

"I shall paint him a couple of boats," he said.

"What does he mean by 'the other side of the ferry'?" asked Saskia.

They all cried out at her, in their way.

"Well, I'm not as clever as the rest of you," she protested. "I've been wanting to ask all the time: I thought you wouldn't shout so, if a stranger was present."

"A stranger" made them howl all the more.

"Hush! Hush!" interposed the mother, who couldn't stand any tears but her own.

"I have never taken money from any one," repeated old Lokster.

"You're far too particular. You might let the baker go on sending the paper: we'd know then what happens in the world."

"A present from a baker!" He shuddered. "This is

different. This is a present from a King. It is a recognition. Jacob Raff shows he thinks old Lokster—a little more than just old Lokster." His voice trembled. "It is an Order!"

"Alas, orders come late to this house!" exclaimed Peter Paul, brutally, conscious of his "Nassaus."

Every child round the table gazed with accustomed horror at the Black Sheep. Old Lokster, also by habit, heard him not.

"It is a grant from the Sovereign. A patent of nobility and a largesse. I would take it from no lesser hand!"

"But Lis has—lent us money," burst from Mevrouw Lokster's unwilling lips.

Her husband smiled condescendingly, not a whit disconcerted. "True. That was in the days, when I thought Lis—a Crown-Prince." He gazed up into whatever glories of Parnassus he beheld in the halo of the gas-lamp. "A Crown-Prince," he repeated gently. "A Crown-Prince."

"I am starting to paint again," said Lis impetuously. "Portraits."

"Commissions?" asked Peter Paul.

"Try me," put in Saskia.

"I am going to the Hague. Keep my box for me," said Lis.

"Yes, yes," observed old Lokster. "A cow or a goddess: who says that? A goddess to pant after, or a cow—to milk."

Lis gulped down his punch and fled. He found a letter from Yetta awaiting him, the first after many months.

"I have glad news for you, dear Lis—or rather it is glad news for me, but you will rejoice on my account. Your words are coming true, the brave words you spoke, the last words, when you kissed your little Redempta and left us! A great happiness is coming to me soon, Lis, a new link, a close link with the husband of my choosing. My whole life looks different in its light.

"I who in the quite old days, Lis, wanted you to call me

Little Mother, wanted you to think me almighty and able to fulfil all your wishes! And I have done nothing for your happiness! Nothing worth doing! Nothing that has come right.

"Your little Redempta is very happy with the Sisters. I am happy. See how the word comes back, Lis. Be happy too."

Lis Doris stood thoughtful, with dimmed eyes. He felt, in a fine scorn of his own cruelty, that he could bear anything excepting that Yetta should love Pareys. And yet he had done all he could to achieve that end. No, no—not to love—not to *love*!

He passed slowly round his room: various half-faded photographs of young Yetta ornamented its walls. These he, with a pensive leisureliness, took down. He waited longest before a more recent likeness, a full-page engraving from the "*Vie Heureuse*." A French student friend had sent him this. Doubtless Odo had got it inserted. "*La belle épouse du grand peintre hollandais, Pareys*."

At the back there was an enthusiastic little article about the "*blondeur rose*" of the canvases and of the lady. This print Lis now tore across and burnt: the girl-photos he put away. Not in the box left with the Loksters. He carried them off to the Hague. But he never hung them up there. Years afterwards he stood one of them on a stand in a corner of his bedroom at Boldam, in a corner where the sun fell of mornings, when he awoke.

XXXVII

AT the Hague an entirely new existence opened out before Lis Doris. He had turned a corner into the sunshine. True, the sun shone on a carefully tended garden-plot.

In other words, fortune now definitely smiled on the former Boldam grocer's lad, and he worked hard to keep her smiling, for love of the work perhaps more than for hope of the smiles. Especially was he pleased at first to see Jacob so pleased. Jacob lived a couple of miles away from the Hague at a fishing-village, right amongst the toilers he painted, in a big empty studio with a small empty bedroom off it. He cared nothing for luxuries of any kind, possessed not a single curio, such as Lokster had collected with pains. His huge American income he spent, as it came to him, in purchases for the Gallery and large gifts to poor artists. "I hate to think of a good picture," he said, "that a man wants to look at and can't. And I hate to think of an unasked donation that doesn't meet the need."

The drawing of Raff's head by Lis Doris attracted as much attention at the Hague Gallery (largely on account of its subject) as the sketch of the dead Simeon had done in Amsterdam. It attracted more, and—the chief thing, after all!—it attracted sitters. Thanks to Raff's picture, or his personality, or his person, people wrote and asked Lis to paint portraits. Friends of the great artist, or brother-artists, mostly for their relatives, or other friends. A rich cheesemonger, who had read about the head in the newspaper; some neighbours who followed every phase of the cheesemonger's portrayal: the hundred and forty-seven

descendants of a female Somebody, who had obligingly lived to the age of ninety-nine. So the snowball rolled on. The all-pervading progeny of the Mother-in-Israel (she was the widow of a local Rothschild) became to Lis an ever-recurrent advertisement in all the entangled circles of Dutch society. Soon he was known as the man whose prices would be sure to go up. And that—alas, poor artists!—is the best advertisement of all.

"That young fellow, you know, Raff, who did that fine head of you——"

"D—— my head," said Jacob Raff.

The life of a fashionable portrait-painter is not a placid one, unless he be a good deal of a bully, and a bit of a brute. Everybody wants to look better than she can and believes she is made to look worse. Everybody, to attain the former end, makes disastrous suggestions. In Holland even a big success is limited: the insolence or insouciance possible in London or Paris wouldn't pay. Lis was recognised as a very pleasing all-round portrait-painter. So far so good. But the people who paid a hundred pounds for a bit of cloth with a lot of paint to look like grandmama intended to get their full money's worth in the shape of talk, bother, alteration, criticism (of every feature with appropriate variation), squabble about "likeness," and general disapproval. Such disapproval (unspoken, but whispered, nodded, glanced) included, before you had gone the round of the family, attitude, colour-scheme, size, proportion, progress, time of completion, frame. Papa's three daughters severally considered Papa's nose to be aquiline, turn-up and Roman, while the artist had made it "vulture." All three agreed that he had made it "vulture." They were shrilly annoyed with a husband who remarked, looking in, that the nose was too small in the picture. Lis altered "the shadow" at their eager request. The husband said "Punch."

Much later, when the artist was already quite well known, there occurred that terrible misadventure with the very great lady, who "liked the likeness" but declared that the

colour of her mantle was wrong. Next morning she remarked that the colour was now right. And Lis—possibly in honest wrath, but he always affirms it was unintentional!—exclaims that he hasn't touched the thing yet. Which blunder cost Lis, as Peter Paul Lokster would put it, more than one *order*.

And there was that heavy trick, quite at the beginning, of the banker—cousin to the centenarian Rothschild—who talked about himself and his two daughters to Lis all through a long luncheon and then wrote a note about painting "myself and my daughters" for a lump sum. There were ten daughters, each of them uglier than the last. Lis took almost a year over them trying to make them not resemble themselves, or even each other. They nearly killed him. As an artist, at any rate. But he picked up, painted them all over again, with clear strokes, in their native monstrosity, sent them home in a furniture van to their recalcitrant parent, left them, in their ten gilt frames, on his door-step, confidently awaited legal proceedings and three years later, worn to the bone by judicial chicanery, won his case.

Long before that again, as just one break in interminable silences, Lis had received a photograph of Yetta's son. Too rashly, from that photo and the Parsoness's descriptions, he executed a beautiful pastel of the child and sent it to Paris. Let us hope that the mother liked it.

The Parsoness's explanations were vouchsafed to Lis at Boldam. For Lis had taken to spending quiet vacations in his native place. After the first wrench of the return, he was eager to go again.

Not with such feeling did the Parsoness repatriate from Paris. The wee cry of her grand-child had drawn her, with her accompanying "lord," across the frontier. Yes, she and the Dominé had come to the modern Babel, had spent ten days there—ten—days—there—and like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they had issued forth, unharmed. Nay, they were singed, singed in their souls, for ever. The Parsoness never stopped discoursing, to her distant dying day, of the countless abominations in street and house. By

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the latter she especially meant her daughter's servants. The Dominé, so much more sensible than his consort, yet could not help also disapproving, in silence, of P-pareys, and, in reasonable speech, of P-p-paris. The Dominé's dying day was not so very distant: he knew this, and during the last year or two of downward road enjoyed with the keener joy those long vacations of Lis.

"Come, Lis: let us go sit in Abraham's Bosom. You are the only one of my children left!"

"Have you good news of them all, sir?" says Lis, a little pale from the town-life. He feels reproachfully that he only really wants news of one.

"I have. Will you smoke, Lis? Don't smoke too much. I have always smoked too much. Ryk is doing well in the Argentine amongst his horses. Fancy a son of mine happy breaking-in wild horses! I have never even been able to manage to tame such donkeys as I found in my path."

"Perhaps a son of Mevrouw Dominé——" suggested Lis, slyly. He watched the blue curl of his cigar.

"You are right, Lis. There are few more beautiful things in this world than the development of a mother's virtues in her son."

"And a father's in his daughter?" proposed Lis, anxious to get to Yetta.

"When he has them," replied the Dominé gravely. "My virtues have always seemed negative to me. As far as I am aware, I have done little harm."

"Conscious harm, I mean of course," added the Dominé.

"There's a little surprise awaiting you at the Golden Gate," said Lis softly.

The Dominé's eyes were fixed on the far Plato. His companion's were also riveted on a portrait, the incongruous lady in laces and furs amongst the dingy divines against the book-case.

"You have come here to rest, Lis."

"Yes, and to paint. Human faces, not the masks of Vanity Fair. That is my relaxation. The peasants here—

my own people—have souls, good or bad, in their countenances, such as nature gave them. The town ladies have souls too, of course, but they're trimmed, not to show, like a made dish."

"You see the souls better here, because they are your own p-people."

"I see the souls of the great ladies too, very often. If I were to paint one of them as I see it, I should never get another commission."

"Don't become a m-misogynist, Lis."

"Or the great gentlemen's," laughed Lis. "No, I am not a misanthropist yet, though I have been for several years a fairly successful Society Painter. Nobody sees human evil, and the anxiety to hide it, like a successful Portrait-Painter, with his eyes digging down for hours into the secrets of the civilised face."

"I suppose a portrait by you now costs a great deal of money, Lis?"

"I have my fixed prices, Dominé. Raff warned me at once about that. It's the only way to keep clear, and clean."

"My 'Song of Songs' has brought me in quite a nice little sum, chiefly on account of the stir made by the Orthodox party. They wanted me turned out of the Church, Lis. They said I was amorous." The Dominé drew together the folds of his imperishable dressing-gown. "I do not think I ever was amorous, Lis. I have carefully gone into the accusation. I hold it unjust."

"You had enthusiastic partisans. I know all about it," said Lis.

The Dominé heaved a deep sigh. "But those of mine house were against me. I could not get my dear wife to distinguish between the c-commentator and the man."

At this appalling picture Lis grew still. It was the first time in all the long years that he had heard the Dominé utter anything like a complaint concerning the Parsoness.

"She draws comparisons between me and that terrible

creature at Aldervank, Job Boonbakker." The Dominé bowed his grey head in contemplation of Pareys's cigar, the only good thing he owed to his rich son-in-law. "She says that to get love-making out of the Bible is doubly sin." He shook himself. "Dear, dear, she means well always—do I?" The Dominé looked round at Lis. "Who shall say? But I should like to have my portrait painted by you, Lis, for Yetta, before—before I am too old," said the Dominé, smiling gravely.

Lis would have spoken impetuously.

"Hush! I intend to pay for it. Your fixed price."

"I couldn't do a stroke."

"The 'Song of Songs' will pay for it. You need only paint my face. What's the use of painting this?" He took up a fold of the now-unfading dressing-gown.

"It is a beautiful shade of puce," said Lis.

"At least it is clean," replied the Dominé, with a faint tinge of colour. "I cannot think why the village has always called me 'D-dusty.' I never could abide a stain."

"You don't mean this about paying," persisted Lis.

"I do. It is a 'sine qua non.' Do you understand so much Latin? I often re-p-proach myself that I did not teach you more. Well, well, you have been a success, all the same. I know a great deal of Latin, and I have not." The Dominé said this without chagrin. It was nearly half a century since he had understood that he could only be incumbent of Boldam.

So Lis painted him. One of the artist's best portraits. It hangs where nobody can get to see it. *N'en déplaise à Jacob Raff!*

The Paroness thinks the painting was "a vanity" and the paying "a crime." But after she had once heard the price of a Doris portrait, she never again alluded to "the Grocer's Fool." Lis, with the Dominé's ultimate consent, gave the money to the Aldervank Infirmary. Said the Paroness to her husband: "Your gift."

XXXVIII

WHEN the Dominé died, Lis Doris astounded the neighbourhood by buying the Parsonage. Repairs had been needed for a long time, but the "Church Commission" had fought the Parsoness over every pennyworth of house-paint "seeing that old Dusty was breaking up fast." Old Dusty ended the squabble.

Lis Doris presented the parish with a more suitable site, near the church. The Parsonage, like so many of these clergymen's dwellings in a part where land is still cheap, had a good-sized garden attached to it, of no particular value, although it lay just off the main street. The house itself was an honest, square seventeenth-century building, with a tall roof and good attic windows that alone would have saved it from vulgarity. The bronze blinds lay in laths against its brown brick walls.

In the Study, on the day after the funeral, Lis found himself face to face with Yetta. She had hurried over from Paris, alone, too late. For the Dominé had troubled nobody about his departure. He had tried occasionally to prepare his wife for the shock, but the Parsoness only answered: "Pooh!" The last thing he had said to her, late one night, was: "I feel a bad pain in my side." The Paroness, grey and spectacled, looked up from "reports."

"Clasine must make you some camomile tea," she answered.

The unobtrusive maid did everything in the house, as she had always done. Next morning the Paroness, turning her frilled head, saw the untasted cup by her

husband's pillow. She flung an angry protest across to him. For the first time it did not hit.

"I have been feeling my way about acquiring this house," said Lis. "I shall buy it."

"You?" She looked up in astonishment. They had not met since Aldervank. She was handsomer than ever, in the ease of her position and her wealth.

"The 'Church Commissioners' are eager to build a new parsonage. The greatest rogue in the parish, the builder, is of course one of them."

She smiled. "Fockens?" she said.

"Yes, young Fockens. The old thief is dead."

"And you want to acquire this place, Lis? Why this one?—why not?" She broke off.

"Why not my own old home a few yards lower down? Because I could make nothing of that, whilst I can of this, and because the drunken creature who lives in it has desecrated it for me, and because—because it belongs to a man who—wouldn't sell it."

"It belongs to me, Lis. It is my only possession."

"Let me leave it in your hands then. I shall like to live here." He went to close the door.

"Do not do that," she said quickly.

He looked at her: she blushed, a hot scarlet, but the blush died away at once: she lifted her head.

"Don't you feel a draught?" he insisted.

"Yes, but it is a warm draught."

"Your experience of men has been a strange one since we parted," he said in a thick voice.

"Lis!" she answered softly, in sorrowful amazement.

"I promised my husband," she added quickly, "to avoid a *tête-à-tête*."

"He exacted the promise!" cried Lis.

"No. He does not exact."

Lis took a couple of quick turns in the long room. By the window:

"You love him!" he said. His heart stood still.

He had said it, then, this thing he was resolved not to say.

She did not answer for a moment, wishing she had not heard, yet knowing that silence was a denial.

"You do not like him," she replied. "Nor he you. I admit that. And I see so much good in you both."

"What good do you see in me?" he demanded irritably, gaining time.

"As much as I did twenty-five years ago. That ought to suffice you."

"And what good, pray, in him?" He knew he was wrong: he couldn't help himself: he pressed his burning forehead against the pane.

"Lis, how absurd you are! He is the father of my child."

"True," he said. He was relieved, in spite of himself, to see how her woman's heart defeated him. He dropped his chin. Like a whipt cur, he told himself.

"Shall we talk of my little boy? What a fine pastel you sent me! I prefer my little boy to every other subject, but of course it is a fearful trial to my friends."

"It will not be a trial to me," answered Lis, dropping down into Abraham's Bosom.

Clasine, at work in the kitchen opposite—how many thousand times had her psalm-humming tormented the Dominé!—Clasine, squinting across, called "Lunch!"

"I suppose Clasine goes with your mother?" said Lis, rising unwillingly.

Yetta laughed—the old laugh! Lis's whole face lighted up to hear it.

"I am afraid my mother has all her life long had one or two mercies she didn't appreciate. She says 'At last I am my own mistress.' That alludes to Clasine."

"She was fond of your father. She mourns for him."

"Undoubtedly. But I shall have to pension Clasine."

"Don't, please. I want to retain her here as my housekeeper. No, that isn't fair."

"Shall we ask her what she would prefer?" suggested Yetta.

"First-rate. You always know the best way out of every difficulty."

She would have protested, but—no. Instead, she stood in the "Great Gulf" and called to the maid.

Clasine entered the study. She had done so but seldom, for the Dominé preferred to dust his own books after the departure of Yetta. All men know how much female energy is wasted on displacing dust.

In the rest of the house, garden, poultry-yard, etc., all except the Parsoness's Charity Closet (for which she had the deepest contempt), Clasine Clotterblokke ruled supreme. She was uninteresting, as the perfect Duty-machine is apt to be. She had no history. Scandal slipped (and hurt itself) off her white-enamelled name. She revered nothing on earth but the Dominé. She despised nothing on earth but the Parsoness. She loved—since her young lover had died—the Parsonage children, and bright kitchen pans. She could do everything that was expected of her, and she made allowance for us all. During more than forty years she had kept that house together, and as much of the household as circumstances would permit. Ryk, out in Argentina, sowing various kinds of oats with pleasure and profit, had taken along Clasine's portrait, as painted by Lis. There was nothing remarkable about the woman. She had no eccentricities and could not have played the part of comic servant to anybody. She stood now, wondering what these two might want with her.

"My sweet omelet will be ruined—eh?" she said. She had a habit of saying "eh?" at the end of her sentences, but such tricks get so tiresome, reproduced.

"Tell your French cook that you kept it waiting, if he asks about my omelet," she said.

"I will." Yetta pictured the fussy chef in front of

the Dutchwoman's Sunday master-piece. "Would you like Clasine, to stop working and rest?"

"I can't," said Clasine promptly. "There's heaps to do."

"No, but I mean go and live quietly. Rest."

Clasine stared from one to the other. She wasn't as young as she had been. She was very red, and grey, and stout.

"Kest?" she said. "Not till the Lord makes a week of Sundays." She smoothed down her black dress, and as she did so, her full colour deepened. "The poor Dominé," she sighed. "That's what he said Heaven would be. Sundays without preaching, he said."

"Mevrouw Pareys offers you a pension," put in Lis.

"Thank her kindly, and I wish it was a place," said Clasine.

Yetta's eyes fairly danced. "You would come and live with me in Paris?"

"No, Mevrouw Yetta, for you can't yoke a cow to a gilt wedding-chaise."

"I offer you a place," persisted Lis, who, like all men, wanted his lunch, as it was ready. "I am going to buy this house: will you live in it when I'm here, and when I'm away?"

"Will Mevrouw Dominé live here too?" asked Clasine.

"No. What were you going to say?"

"There are things the Lord spares our saying," replied Clasine.

"I mean when I jumped up just now, were you going to accept? I hope so."

"I accept," said Clasine. "And the pension too, Mevrouw Yetta, when I lose my limbs. I thought I was going to be let depart in peace, but I much prefer to stay."

"I shall alter the house, Clasine. And have artist friends. You will see queer goings on, when the place is no more a Parsonage."

"The queerest goings on are in parsonages," replied

Clasine. "It's their being parsonages, makes the goings on so queer."

At this stage Lis and Yetta thought best to think little and speak less. They went in search of the Parsoness, who never in her life had obeyed a first summons to a meal.

XXXIX

IF Clasine was constitutionally unsurprisable, the rest of the Boldamites, although stolid, possessed eyes that could widen and tongues that could wag. Such eyes and such tongues now, and ever after, found a centre of interest in the changes at the Parsonage. Boldam, in its own way, was proud of its incomprehensible son. It heard that Lis Doris had achieved distinction, notoriety: for these it cared nothing. But it saw that the grocer's son had grown into an affluent gentleman, and for this—especially the visible affluence—it cared very much. No surer proof of Fortune's folly need be sought than that a man should make money by "painting dolls." All Boldam was unanimous in preferring the landscapes with which young Ropes, the house-decorator's son, had ornamented his mother's "State Chamber," copies of an Italian volcano, and a Levantine boy. "*That's pictures*," said all Boldam. It regretted the professional rivalry which made Lis Doris refuse to young Sam Ropes (even after the poor boy's father had fallen off the ladder) such help as he, Lis Doris, had received from Mynheer Pareys. But in spite of small strictures the village, on the whole, approved its native artist, and appreciated, as Dutch peasants inevitably would, his simplicity, his generosity, his averseness to all pose. It watched the slight modifications of the house with disappointment, for it had expected much more. It had looked forward to a modernised red and white Villa Beauséjour or Sans Souci: the new owner shocked the most religious by producing no new name. He simply put "Boldam" on his note-paper. The Dominé's successor, young, pert, far more ecclesiastically pious than the Dominé, said the painter-man's

behaviour was a source of great confusion. He exaggerated. A year later he said the painter-man's presence was a source of great scandal. Wherein he exaggerated still more, as a pert young parson, when ecclesiastically very pious, should.

The scandal of the painter-man consisted chiefly in the presence of the painter-men who came to stay with him. And of the painter-women. Such "Summer-flies" as Boldam had always known, and scorned, gathered to it from neighbouring townlets and were reasonable creatures compared with artists, city-bred or foreign. The costumes of these latter harmless pleasers surpassed all Boldamite belief. Their shrill laughter, their loud "gibberish," their eagerness to get at the natives, their persistence before every common object of utility, which they somehow seemed never to have seen before, these aroused a most righteous indignation in the breasts of the serious-lived aborigines. Yet all had one reply to the new parson: "He brings a deal of money into Boldam, does Doris—Mynheer Doris, I ought to say."

The high-born neighbours, indifferent on this subject, expressed amusement, in the course of their mutual dinner-parties, over the local romance. When—a rare event—some high-born somebody from outside their circle came to visit them, they drove round, past the Old Parsonage, not calling, of course, and showed their friends the place where the Hague portrait-painter lived. Pareys had been quite possible: Lis naturally was not. The Baroness Bigi of Tietstjumperadeel felt that painting was proper as long as you didn't do it well enough to get paid. And yet she thought she did it most admirably. And also she sold her paintings, only at bazaars. You have to be a Baroness Bigi, before you can intelligently arrange an increasing number of incompatible prejudices in your cobwebbed and coroneted countrified brain. All the five (unmarried) daughters of the Bigis, tall and condescending in the lowliest cottages, painted, just as they played and sang, throughout their long leisure hours. They painted beautifully, a creation such as eye hath never,

seen. Birds, presumably of Paradise, flowers, doubtless of Paradise too. Staying in the Hague one year, the two elder sisters were shown a couple of Lis's portraits at the Gallery. They thought them "crude."

That, of course, is the one characteristic in which they are recognised to be almost deficient. Lis Doris reveals a tendency to poetise his sitters, for good or for evil. You must take your chance, just as he takes *you*, with the hidden heart of you, fair or foul, because you have come to him, to be portrayed. With the models he selects amongst his summer neighbours the thing is different. He has always had a weakness for beauty, beautiful beauty, while a painter ought to appreciate the beauty of ugliness, the beauty of vice. There were a lot of hideously characteristic old men and women at Boldam, that he oughtn't to have pretended not to see.

It was quite a blow to him to receive his first photograph of the foster-child, Redempta. The horrible drunken mother at the grocer's shop he ignored: the shop itself he accepted as a wholesome memento, only to be mentioned, with modest satisfaction, to the very most intimate of his foreign friends. He had vainly asked, twice, in his infrequent letters to Yetta, for a likeness of the growing, inevitably altered child. The Baroness de Rossac vented her spite in irresponsiveness, furious with him for declining to come to Paris and finish her portrait, now that he was famous. "I cannot come to Paris," he answered. "I will finish it, or if you have altered a little in the last dozen years, I will repaint it, here." "Why can't he come to Paris? Why?" The malicious Madame de Rossac (very much altered) reiterated this question to Yetta, reiterated it to Odo. Othello, worn and ill, sick for his unrepeatd success, but wondrously happy with, and proud of, his little son, enigmatically smiled.

"I don't know," he said, "I don't think the French quite appreciate his work."

"They have given him a medal?"

"Oh yes, they give everybody medals." Odo squinted down at his button-hole.

"Ah!" cried the rouged and furbelowed Baroness, "he speaks from the glory of his Legion of Honour! Yes, *that* is a distinction! But then, you are Pareys. You are unique. You have a speciality. Eh, Yetta? 'La brume argentine de l'atmosphère. La blondeur rose des terrains!'"

"Yes," said Yetta, looking up from some fashion-plates. "Odo has painted the heath as nobody else has ever painted it."

"Why does he not go back and paint it again? Take me to Aldervank: your Doris will find me unchanged."

"I tell you," persisted Pareys irritably, "they do not care here for his style. Come, Alex, it is time for our ride."

"Are his paintings really not good?" queried the ignorant Madame de Rossac. Pareys, who had risen, gave that little shrug of his shoulders: it was too manifestly his interest to keep Lis in the background.

"His portraits are excellent," said Yetta, her eyes on a blue lady. "Even your 'cher maître' now admits that. He said to me the other day, at the Salon: 'He has found the "demi-teinte" which gives the mystery of life to a human visage. His flesh has that true "coloris, qui est souvent presque sans couleur"!'"

"You seem to have learnt his words by heart!" cried Pareys, at the door, with a flare of the old feeling.

"They have stuck in my memory," replied Yetta quietly.

"It sounded as if he were speaking of the old Dutch masters. I was glad to hear it from *him*."

The Baroness veered round. "Why don't you paint a portrait?" she said. "Paint me!"

"I can't. It is an inferior art."

"You haven't painted anything for years! Not for years. We have all forgotten you. Remind us. Do some more!"

He turned in the doorway, with almost a smothered French oath. "Come, Alex!" he said.

"Do you always evince such an interest in Doris?" amiably inquired Madame de Rossac of her friend.

"You referred to him. Would you believe that his name has not been mentioned between us for years?"

"I would believe it. It is not as I should act, but I willingly believe it. I make you my compliment."

"Let me advise you to send him the photograph," replied Yetta with spirit. "He will think you are keeping it back from pique."

"Pique against a painter!" exclaimed the Baroness de Rossac.

She posted off a photo, in the Charity dress, from the Charity Home, next day. Lis flung it into a drawer with a pucker on his face that was half disappointment and half self-reproach. He had not imagined possible that the pretty baby could develop so swiftly into a young feminine something so painfully plain!

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XL

IT was a hot summer-night at Boldam, too hot, with the threat of distant thunder, the press of approaching storm. All the windows of the Old Parsonage were open. Lis sat in his own room, that had been Yetta's. He sat smoking, his feet against the fire-dogs, his eyes on the desolate hearth. A week ago, in this changeable climate, the evenings had been chilly: charred embers still lay in the fire-place. "For these foreign and half-foreign people make fires in the summer! And they make them on the floor!" said Clasine. The old servant found Lis a perpetual trial, which she could only endure, after much self-torture, by the compromise of considering him "half-foreign." "Spoilt, you know"—a shake of the head—"by living in them queer foreign parts!" Clasine thanked God twice daily, kneeling humbly by her bedside, that He had never obliged her to travel in a train. Such was the good soul who, peering behind shutters, watched, summer after summer, some fresh cargo of "painter-folk" disembarked at the Old Parsonage door.

Lis, forging ahead, was not one to mete out, in life, the pros and cons of contentment. He could face the dull blackness of his hearth, as he sat there in the lowering night. He could recall, with a pitiful philosophy, the grave in the Boldam churchyard, over which he had placed what the expectant villagers considered a meagre memorial. He could wish Yetta, whilst he sat in her altered chamber, such happiness as the untoward fates might grant. He had flung him, near the start: that being admitted, he was grateful to have fallen on moss. His eyes wandered amongst the various mementoes of friendships and pleasant

encounters, of home-parties and public honours, that were scattered about this room. His intimate treasures he thus collected in the Parsonage: less simple in his tastes than Jacob Raff, he had ornamented his Hague studio with impersonal, and often costlier, toys. He was a collector, like old Lokster, with so much later chances, but with so much longer purse.

His greatest treasure of all, the one, at least, on which he set most value, was neither at Boldam nor in the Hague. It was where he had left it through all these hurrying years, untouched, in the box that the Loksters held in keeping. It was the last bit, the best bit, of landscape that he had ever painted, his "Heat on the Heath." He had considered himself bound in honour never to touch landscape, even for his own secret delectation, for that, at any moment, might have been betrayed. He was a portrait-painter. He had kept faith.

The existence of the hidden picture had grown to him a fever and a fascination. He did not like to think of it, least of all in a silent and sultry night such as this.

Its presence in the Buitenkant house was perhaps a reason why he had given up—years ago!—visiting the Loksters. They no longer needed him. Peter Paul, lured to Newport, to paint historical family scenes on the walls of the Nassau mansion, had acquired fame and dollars in the land of the art-loving millionaire. He supported the old father in Amsterdam, who was grown quite doddering, a *détraquée* talking-machine. All the children, as far as Lis knew, earned something in the humbler walks of art. Hendrikje had become first assistant, then wife, to a hair-dresser: Saskia drew Greenaways.

Twice Job Boonbakker had come across from Aldervank and demanded the sale of the picture. Pareys, of course, was anxious to produce it as a later work of his own. People began to wonder at the great painter's inertia. Of course he was a dilettante: that made all the difference. He lived in society, not in art-circles: He had kept his amateur work

to himself for years, only showing it, suddenly, to please his wife. His health was delicate: he had no need, no desire, to sell. When some one of sufficient importance asked to see his recent painting, he shook his head gravely. No, no: those days were over. He allowed it to be understood that he still painted, behind locked doors.

But that was indeed the Nemesis of his evil action. Sick and wealthy, he had sacrificed the amusement of a lifetime. He dared not, with his assumed reputation, put a pencil to paper. He had burnt all his cherished mediocre achievements before leaving Aldervank.

Twice, then, Job Boonbakker had waylaid Lis Doris, the first time at the Parsonage door with courtesy, the second on the heath with threats. The second meeting, therefore, had been the more effective. As an incident, not a result. For Lis had said "no" all the more clearly, and turned his broad back on the snarling teeth of the cur.

That had been a couple of months ago—the second demand: Lis had heard nothing since. It worried him, this fresh persistence after such a long first interval. Job Boonbakker, quiet, surreptitious, was yet the most notorious scoundrel in the neighbourhood. Mothers spoke of him with bated breath, as he slid by. Little children learnt to call him—a long way behind his back: "the Ogre." Strange whisperings of orgies encircled the big silent house of Aldervank. The man had money enough: his master never stinted him. His stinginess rendered him the more unpopular: he paid only an inevitable minimum for his wants and his crimes. The old father at the Holst was dead of shame: the old mother lived on for ever, laughing at every sin that was not grey-haired as venial, and carrying her silver-banded face and her gold-clasped hymn-book to church on every Sabbath. The Baroness Bigi said: "Hush!" when "the Ogre of Aldervank" was mentioned in her daughters' presence: the baron sent the man day after day, with touching iteration, a different

tract (a hundred for a dollar and then you began again) per post, in a coroneted envelope. Open, on account of the stamp. One morning—the day the prize cow died—he forgot: Job Boonbakker sent a civil message in the course of the day to inquire after Mynheer the Baron's health. It was the only impertinent thing he ever did, in all his long life of sin, to a social superior. Lis he did not consider his superior. The boy bicycled back with the news that the Baron wasn't dead but the cow. "What a pity!" said Job.

Ruminating, as gravely as yon deceased quadruped had ever ruminated, Lis Doris, his (good) cigar in his mouth and his (honest) eyes on the grate, accepted with a not ungrateful recognition these developments that had combined to make his life what it was at this moment, now that it had entered its fourth decade. He had not achieved anything he had aspired to. He had achieved a great deal. He realised that: he liked to realise it, at Boldam.

He got up and stood by the open window. The night was pitch dark: in the distance the thunder rolled, uninterruptedly. And heavy heat hung thick among the silent trees.

By craning his neck round the corner, he could just see the light from the grocery window, low on the foliage-hidden street. The lamp there burned late, as in his father's time. It was near midnight. He stood there in the hush of threatening tempest: he stood gazing into the blackness, gazing towards the unseen heath. It was the heath that called him, that called him. "I was a fool," he said to himself, for the fiftieth time, "I should never have come back to Boldam at all."

Something moved, down against the shrubbery: it moved again—some animal perhaps—a cat? He took an electric hand-lamp off a table and directed its full glare on the spot. A female figure, looking up to him, swiftly hid its face in its hands! "Come down to me, and open!" cried a voice he seemed faintly to remember. Wondering,

he obeyed the call. He had only his electric hand-lamp : the whole sleeping house lay dark.

"Saskia !" he exclaimed, in the little entrance-hall. She stood, smitten by the bar of white light.

"Yes ; Saskia." She was hatless, in rather cheap evening muslin and laces, with much orange-coloured hair and a white cloak. She turned her blue eyes on him. She was handsome as he had always known her, a bit coarsened, a woman of thirty, such as Rubens would have loved.

"Well ?" she said impatiently.

"I am waiting for you to speak."

"You might make it easier for me. Ask me something ! Ask me why I am come."

"Why, indeed ? At this hour ? In this weather ? This dress ?"

"You ask too much at a time. Don't you want to know how my father is ?"

"Indeed I do. Has that brought you ?"

"Yes and no. That glare is blinding." He turned the tube aside : they both remained in the half-light.

"But where do you come from ?" he implored.

"Explain, if I can help."

"That's like you, Lis"—her harsh voice had softened.

"No, it is I have come to help you." He waited.

"I have come from Aldervank. I ran all the way."

"You—in this dress ?" he turned the light on her shoes.

"Take your thumb off the spring ! What I have to say I want to say in the dark." He loosed his hold : the little entry was black as ink.

"Yes, I am come from Aldervank. Do you not want to know what I did there ?"

"Not unless you wish to tell me." Lis felt with his back for the wall.

"Yes, I wish to tell you—to tell you everything, because it might have been so different. So different, Lis, ten years ago !"

She resented the righteous resistance in his refusal to reply. "R-r-r!" she rolled between her set teeth. "Well, so be it!" Her tones broke away in sudden humbleness. "You were not to blame in any way: I admit it. When a man hopes, 'tis a brave thing. When a woman hopes—'tis her shame."

"Saskia!" His voice showed how she tortured him: for a man's it was very near to tears.

"Say you never dreamt of this! It will be some satisfaction to me to think I kept my secret. It is such an old secret now: let us say it is a dead secret. It is quite, quite useless—left a long way up the downward road!"

"Surely you have not come here from Aldervank to tell me this!"

"Partly. To tell you how dead it is. How dead, dead, dead. Do you hear me?—dead. And to feel, for myself, how vain would have been my betrayal of it. You can see, even for such a woman as I am, that there must be some satisfaction there!"

"For heaven's sake, do not speak like that!"

"Well, I am sick of drawing Greenaways. Worthless Greenaways that nobody wants. All the others are earning pittances: the Black Sheep is the only real success. That is an incentive. So now there are two Black Sheep."

Unconsciously Lis pressed the lamp: it flashed sideways. She shrank back.

"Yes, I am at Aidervank," she said. "Mr. Boonbakker knows you, as you know."

"I know," said Lis.

"Knows you and hates you. But he did not tell us that when he first made father's acquaintance. He walked into the house one day and asked if we had curios for sale."

"He knows nothing about curios," said Lis, with asperity.

"Doesn't he? Nobody ever does—does he?—in another man's opinion. He talked about them with father. Or rather, he allowed father to talk. They struck up a friendship. It was weeks before he mentioned you."

"And then?" asked Lis anxiously.

"He told us bad things about you, Lis. But I knew they were not true."

"How did you know?"

"Because they were bad, Lis."

He hung against the wall.

"And yet when he said sweet things about me, I believed them! So like a woman! A stupid woman, Lis!" She steadied her voice. "Father didn't mind about you. He said genius had laws of its own."

"He still deems me a genius!" exclaimed Lis bitterly.

"Yes, he always said he had proof of that. He was always mysterious about his proof."

"I presume he is mysterious still?"

"No, he is more explicit now, perhaps because he is more garrulous. No, it is not that: Mr. Boonbakker has convinced him. He says now it is a sin to keep back the proof he has got. The world, he says, shall see it, shall know that he is right. He is going to confide his proof to Mr. Boonbakker, Lis—to make public!"

"God in heaven!" exclaimed Lis. He had understood.

"Hush! You will rouse your house. I am right, then: I see. It is as I say. My father has some secret of yours in his keeping. It isn't safe there any longer, is it?"

"It is my picture!" cried Lis in extreme agitation. "He's found out about it! He's gone to him! He has got it!"

"Not yet!" she cried, sharing his excitement. "Very nearly—but not yet."

"Not yet gone?" He pressed the spring: he flashed the full light in her face.

"Yes, he is gone—or I could not be here." She blinked her eyes: she put out her hand to stop him.

"He is gone!" she said. "He got a letter from my father which decided him. He is driving to catch the early train to Amsterdam."

"You know what was in the letter? You got at it?"

She smiled superbly: the scornful smile remained in her voice. "One does not get at Job Boonbakker's things unless he desires it. I am in his confidence, as far as his chooces. He believes that I hate you—as much as he does."

"Saskia, I almost wish you did!"

"Do not taunt me! No, I suppose you mean well, but there are things no woman should say, and things no woman should hear. A man may say and do everything, everything. A man! Mr. Boonbakker locks up the house. I escaped down by a low balcony, a water-pipe!"

Suddenly Lis saw the spot, in the dark, saw himself slipping to the ground, in a calmer summer night, obeying the call of the heath. She must occupy the room he had had! The thunder had drawn steadily nearer. They could hear the first heavy drops coming pattering against the trees.

"How much has he told?" said Lis, thickly.

"My father wrote, 'I will let you have the thing. Come and fetch it.' That is all I know. Job cried out 'At last!' and an insult I need not repeat."

"He can't insult," said Lis. "So he has gone to Amsterdam. I must catch the last train. I heard the church clock strike some minutes ago."

"He started for the station in a chaise," explained Saskia, breathlessly. "It takes him about forty minutes to drive there, doesn't it? He hopes to catch the last train from Hoogst to Zwolle, and to go on to-morrow by the first express."

"I must catch that last train! I must stop him!" cried Lis, running out at the front door.

Saskia ran after him. "He won't catch it," she gasped.

He stopped, already on his way to the stable. "Why not?"

"Because I loosened the screws of one wheel and gave the cap a turn or two," she said smiling. "The chaise may go a good bit on the road, but that cap's bound to jump off on the heath."

"Saskia! The wheel! It may kill him."

"It may. In fact, it easily may. Why not?"—she stamped her foot—"Oh, it's too late for this sort of talk. You didn't think we were playing?"

Without answering her, he led the way. She held the lamp, screening it, whilst he hurriedly and carefully saddled his horse.

"Take a coat," she said. "It is pouring." She drew her own rain-spotted cloak around her.

He snatched at his servant's waterproof: he had taken a cap from the hall.

"But you?" he said.

"I shall wait here till the shower is over and walk back."

"That is impossible."

"Like most of the things I have to do in my life!" She attempted a laugh. "Have you more servants? More coats?"

He had leaped to the saddle, for every moment was needed.

"I have only one. But there's a thick Inverness in the entrance. Still, you cannot——"

"Why, here's wooden shoes!" she cried, her light dancing through the outhouse. "And straw! I know how to wear wooden shoes——"

"But, Saskia, you cannot——"

She herself struck his horse and drove it forth into the pelting night.

AS ill-luck would have it, the mare was far from fresh having carried Lis and a couple of guests through a hot picnic all that long summer-day. Her master recalled this with the more poignant regret, because he knew she would not show fatigue, as long as she could pretend to hide it.

He rode against the crashing, flashing, dashing tempest, his lips tight, under the drip of his moustache; along the bridle-paths as far as feasible, and then across the ink-black heath. Not that he really believed, hoping wildly against hope. His best faith was pinned, as he felt with a dull terror, on Saskia's little story of the loosened wheel. Only a woman surely, a heavy, quiet, handsome woman, could do a thing like that, so simply, and send forth her lover to his death!

We are doubly unjust, we men. The women who treat us badly we revile: but still more do we abuse those women who treat others badly for our sake.

Lis rode on as fast as the bay mare could carry him, through the heat and the howling storm. It is not true that he abused the woman who had warned him: he shuddered as he realised, but faintly, the furnace of her soul.

He must get to Amsterdam, somehow, in time. He must save the one proof that was left him, for his own sake, of his past. He had been a fool to leave it where he deemed it safe, afraid to touch it. He might have guessed—he might have dreamed—and what was the use of a treasure that he never could see?

The rain slanted down against his breast. The mare shook her head, hastening, hastening on.

Oh, what was the use of demonstrating and arguing? In matters of emotion the heart reasons best. The hidden picture meant more to him than he dared, in this moment of anguish, to fathom. Pareys shouldn't have it, to call it his!

Pareys! Pareys, the liar and impostor! Pareys, who held all his beautiful landscapes, all the triumph and the joy of his boyhood on the heath. Pareys, the famous Dutch "paysagiste," the unique colourist, world-renowned, of the Holland moors. The mare—the white horse of Lis's boy-dreams—bounded and stumbled, in the darkness, on the heather, bedraggled and slippery under her feet.

She slipped again. He held her up, between his legs. He heard her gasp.

"Gently!" he said. From that moment he abandoned what hope he still had. He drew rein, going carefully. His right hand stroked the horse's neck. "You shall not pay for my picture," he said.

When the lamp of the little platform at last glimmered into view, two bigger lights shone beside it. They were those of the engine, already shrieking a far signal across the thunder, as the carriages slid forward and glittered away.

"Gone!" said Lis, as he alighted, bodily and mentally limp.

"Gone!" said the sympathetic porter-stationmaster. The mare hung her head.

"I *must* catch the early express to Amsterdam," said Lis. "There isn't a goods train?"

"Oh, not along this little line," said the man.

"I can't send a telegram?"

"Not till seven in the morning," said the man.

"I'm lost, then!" said Lis. He turned towards the lonely farm-house, to find shelter and rest for his steed.

In this he was successful, having knocked up a farm-hand in a shed. The slow railway-man slouched after him.

"I've been thinking, Mynheer Doris, the guard, that came-by this afternoon, said one of those new engines that run along the road had turned up at Rammelen. You've read about them in the newspapers: 'tis the first in these parts. They go faster than a train, he says: not that I believe him. And if they do, they didn't oughter."

"A motor-car!" exclaimed Lis. "Yes, I've read about them. I've not yet seen one."

"Well, there's one at Rammelen,—belongs to a iron-works," said the railway-man, nodding his head to the sleepy clown, who nodded his.

"I can drive to Rammelen in less than an hour," remarked the clown, sleepy, but foreseeing tips. Lis Doris was famous for largesse on all the country-side.

"They do say it goes faster than a train," repeated the porter with scornful relish.

Lis Doris decided to push on to Rammelen in a rickety wagonette. In those days the motor-car was in its infancy, as noisy as was ever infant, and as fractious. Filled with such curiosity as now draws us to the air-ship, Lis found the proprietor, an iron-smith, quite willing, when noisily awakened, to make a huge sum out of his opportunity, as the storm had passed by and the stars were coming out. The motor-car itself was a one-cylinder cock-shell, with a rattle like a tin full of tin-tacks, brand-new, a wonder of the day.

"It will take you straight to Amsterdam, in five hours, for a hundred and fifty guilders," said its proud possessor. It did the distance in less than twice that time, which shows that motorist to have been an in exaggerative man.

Flying, externally damp and internally distraught, in an open car which bumped and banged (and burst) along the highway, Lis Doris blessed as never before the Smithery progress of the age. He had an artist's dislike of modern industrialism, which fills, from a million altars to Mammon, God's whole beautiful world with smoke. "But this," he

said, wiping the tears from his unprotected eyes, "is wonderful. Yes, the air has grown cold." Then they burst their first tyre.

Even without such mishaps it takes a long time to curl round the Zuyder Zee. You enjoy the splendours of a three o'clock sunrise: you reckon out for the dozenth time that you cannot reach the Buitenkant before the other man: you speculate, also for the dozenth time, whether he can possibly be lying with a broken neck beside the roadway, and you burst your second tyre. You ask the chauffeur about time, distance, accidents, breakages, petrol, repairs, prices, distance, time—and to all your questions you receive untruthful replies.

It was ten o'clock before Lis, a queer figure, stumbled out of the triumphant rattle-box, at the street corner, and staggered up the steps of 212 Buitenkant.

A frowsy maid-of-all-work, the exact counterpart of her twentieth predecessor, opened the door and said Mynheer Lokster wasn't in.

"Oh, but he must be in: he never goes out," replied Lis.

Surprised at this correction from a stranger, the little maid replied that "it all came to the same."

"I want to go up to him. I used to live here," said Lis. He argued the point with her, by means of a first gold piece, ineffectually, and more effectually, by means of a second, for the little maid was leaving to-morrow, and felt that she might just as well depart, enriched, to-day.

Lis ran straight up to the old man's room and found it empty,—up another ladder, then, to the attics, where the box with the picture had been placed. There were two low chambers, furnished quaintly by the children, with a curtained doorway between them. Voices were audible in the inner room. The picture was there. The men were with it. He was in time.

Old Lokster's oratory rang against the ceiling.

"I am doing the boy," he declaimed, "a service! The

greatest I could do him. Far greater than he deserves. He is a good boy, but he has no sense of"—a long, patient wait—"redundancy." He meant "responsibility," but what did that matter to his companion? "He has committed a crime, the greatest committable. He is a genius——"

"Pooh!" said a well-known voice.

"A god-sent genius!" shouted old Lokster. "Look at *that*!"

Again a long pause: the old man began to weep audibly.

"He painted that—the other day, I believe—and they tell me he has never painted anything else. I don't remember hearing: does he paint? I forget. I forget most things. My son paints very well."

"Now what do you want for this?"

The old man waited. "Want? You mean pay? Didn't I tell you before I don't want pay! I never sold anything people had given to me. Lis gave me this. As a present, when he went away. I give it to you to send to all the—you know what." He began to mumble.

"Exhibitions."

"Yes," cried old Lokster. "Exhibitions! So that all the world may see what a god-sent genius he was!" Old Lokster began to weep again. "I have heard that he's dead," he said.

"I take this picture, then," said Job.

Lis had drawn aside the soft curtain: he stood in the doorway.

Job saw him first from the side. Lis gazed at the man's horrible head, wrapt up in white cloths.

"My picture is still mine," said Lis.

There it leant, straight before him, framed by the box. The sunlight poured in behind it. He saw it again, across the stream of half a life-time. He saw it again. His picture of the heath, as he had felt it. His own picture of his own.

"I have come to claim it, Mynheer Lokster," he said.

Old Lokster ran forward, screaming and sobbing, to embrace him. Job Boonbakker's hand dropped away from the picture: he put it up to his wounded skull.

"I will kill the woman who betrayed me," he said.

XLII

"NOT in this house!" said Lis, authoritatively. "Out on the quay!" Dangerous as the dog was, and vindictive, he owned his master, man.

The two antagonists stood by the motor: an immense crowd had gathered round the amazing sight.

"Don't touch!" said the chauffeur.

"Will you get into this? I have but a few words to say!"

Job Boonbakker recoiled, as the motor-man started the rattle. Job was grizzling in compliant service: he gazed round at all the interested faces: his devotion to Pareys culminated at that moment: he entered the motor-car.

"Drive fast along the water-side," commanded Lis.

The peaceful harbour, with its load of resting vessels, lay calmly a-glitter under the cloudless summer sun. The motor clanged and hooted, scattering sleepers and loafers, four-footed and biped, right and left.

Job Boonbakker, his red face gone sallow, clung to the seat and perhaps almost prayed.

"I have only one thing to say to you," began Lis, in a voice that few ever heard from him, "but it is so important that I want to say it quietly, in a way we both shall remember. I suppose it is no use making you swear anything: you don't keep oaths?"

"No," gasped Job, between his teeth.

"So I imagined. Well, all I have to say is this: on the day that any harm befalls Saskia Lokster, I give your master's secret to the world."

"Even if she breaks her leg out walking?" Job forced his livid cheeks into a grin.

"I believed I was talking to a man of sense," replied Lis coldly. "I will send you a dozen words you can pass on to Mynheer Pareys, if you choose! I give you fair warning, and him—if you choose! What I have done hitherto, I have done. But a life is a life. With men such as you there is no law but the whip. You cur!"—for a moment the impassive hound flashed great fangs at him—"Oh, I know you can bite."

"Ha!" screamed Job. He steadied himself. "I thought we had upset," he said. "I want to get out."

"Good. Stop, driver! Get out. Remember what I have said. I will not repeat it. Good-bye."

Job stood in the road. "The woman isn't really worth killing," he said. "But to kill you! If my master would but bid me do *that*! You who are keeping me away from him! You—you—I didn't believe a man could hate as I hate you."

"Threats are foolish," nodded Lis. But he telegraphed to Saskia, bidding her go to the Old Parsonage and stay there. He spent the rest of the morning cheering up old Lokster, and took the mid-day train to Zwolle. It was a relief not to find the broken-headed Job at the station. It was still more a relief to find Saskia obediently waiting at the Parsonage.

"He suspected me: I am not surprised," she said with a quiet smile. The smile broadened cruelly when she heard of the white cloths.

"Well!" she said. "I could loosen the screws, but I couldn't soften his head."

Lis set down the covered picture.

"You were in time: that is enough," she continued, her gaze following his hands. "Is that the spoil, saved from the spoiler?"

"I can't tell you. Don't ask me. I can't tell you anything," he answered, in much agitation.

"Never mind: I am not as inquisitive as most women of my kind. Oh, my kind isn't a good one. Hendrikje is Virtue."

"Saskia, you are safe from that man, but you mustn't return to him."

"I don't want to. But—I have nobody to whom I can return."

"Your home——"

"No, I banged the door, when I left, and mother locked it. That's over. I can never go back."

"Might not I——"

"No," she cried. She coloured scarlet. "You, least of all. You don't know mother. Her hobby is 'art and respectability.' The hobby is in the 'and.'"

He paced up and down the room in which he had found her.

"Your housekeeper," said Saskia, with that wise little smile of hers, "is not a benignant female. I often wonder: do we all grow malevolent with the years? Or only the virtuous ones? I cannot imagine myself perpetrating unnecessary unkindness to any one."

He stopped. "Not all!" he exclaimed. "You put an idea in my head. There's an old lady lives here—the former minister's wife—you might go to her, till we can decide."

"True: I can't stay in this house," answered Saskia humbly. "Why do you say 'we'? I shall have to fend for myself."

"I will do everything to assist you. I have told about Mevrouw Donderbus in the old days—'the Parsoness,' they called her. She is very much altered since her husband's death. She thinks now, she didn't make him happy—and she didn't—but she never dreamed of the fact during more than forty years. It's quite changed her—up to a point: her one idea now is not to be disagreeable. I admit, Saskia, that she's occasionally disagreeable about that. We can't alter our characters. She was always self-willed."

"I remember, you hated her."

"No, no: I only hate one or two people, who know they're bad. I admit that I rather hate two."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Hate or 'hate," she said. "I don't mean 'hate hatefully.' I never did that. What of this Parsoness? Does she open her house to her sex, on the chance of converting them? I know the kind. I have no money. But I am not convertible."

Again he paced the floor. "She is badly off," he said, "and very independent. She prefers letting a room to taking money from her children. It would be a good house for you to go to: you see she is the mother of Mevrouw Pareys. I should like to go and arrange with her. You—you—I don't know whether I dare ask you—but you would do me an immense favour, if you sat to me for a model I want."

"What? Satan's daughter, Sin?"

He turned to look at her, and her eyes grew even softer than his.

"You are a good man, Lis," she said, in broken accents, "but we knew that before. I wish I could say 'God reward you.' I know there's no use in *my* saying it!"

"It would take a week or ten days," said Lis, staring out of window. "Meanwhile you could make your plans. May I go and see the widow?"

"Whatever you think best I will do," she answered. She held out her hand to take his: with some slight hesitation he gave it. She looked tall and handsome, even stately: her costume with the great straw hat and grey plumes suited her better than the flimsy evening frock. Before he could stop her, she had lifted his hand to her lips.

He put away his picture in the dismantled study, which contained only one other object, bought by him at the Domine's sale, the big sofa, "Abraham's Bosom."

Then he went to consult with the whilom Parsoness in

her little detached "villa," a quarter of a mile down the road.

"You look as if you'd been up all night and out all day!" said Mevrouw Donderbus, with a canny glance. Her face was as red as ever, but her hair was snow-white: she appeared, as she felt, attempered, in her mourning.

"But there, it's no business of mine," she added, as a compulsory afterthought. "Will you have a cup of tea?"

He told her what had brought him.

"Poor woman!" she said. "You shouldn't take your tea so strong. At least, it doesn't suit most people. She would have to conform to the rules of this house, Lis. Mornings and evenings I read the Bible to my little maid."

"She wouldn't mind that, I feel sure," said Lis.

"Mind!"—the old thunder rolled in the Paroness's voice. "Well, well, we must all get what we can out of the Bible, Lis. Perhaps my poor husband was right, when he thought it was amorous!" She sighed heavily. "But I never should have believed it, even of Solomon."

"There have been better men than Solomon," hazarded Lis.

"Perhaps. Now-a-days people talk so. In my time the Bible was the Bible, and there wasn't any good or bad in it. Your woman is an infamous hussy, Lis, and she ought to be put in a Penitentiary."

"Oh, hush, Mevrouw: you forget!"

"Forget what?" she questioned sharply, and peered at him, tea-pot in hand.

"The sugar," he answered boldly, a bit non-plussed.

The old woman laughed, and placed a lump in his cup. "Well, a Home, at any rate! Isn't that sweet enough for you?"

"Two lumps, please. So you will take her: I am so glad. It is only for a few days: you will do her a lot of good."

"I hope so," said the Paroness, with quite touching dubitation. "Do you know, Lis, that with the best intention, we may sometimes not do good but harm?"

"Yes: I do know," said Lis.

"You are still young to have found it out," said the Parsoness gravely. She added with spirit: "And you mustn't exaggerate the feeling, or you'd never do anything worth doing at all!"

"Giving money's easiest," said Lis. "Do you want any more for Mary Lariks?"

"Don't talk of the woman: she's past preaching to! She drinks and she drinks! But she's got her deserts at last. I mean, Heaven has punished her. At least, I hope and trust it was Heaven."

"What has happened?" asked Lis.

"She fell with a lamp and burnt herself badly. I hope it was Heaven."

"Never mind: is she bed-ridden?" Lis called up a picture of the corner—the very bed—where his father had lain so long.

"And likely to remain so. She worries my life out. She's got a crazy idea that she wants to see her child."

"What?" said Lis.

"After having forgotten it for how long?—fifteen years?"

"Nearly twenty," said Lis.

"Just so, a crazy idea! She says she's dying, and she worries and cries. She worries and cries. Such a woman ought to have been whipped."

"It's too late," said Lis.

The Parsoness, solemnly sighing, drank her tea. She drank audibly, with blobs in her neck. "Babble about asking the girl's forgiveness," she said. "Bosh!"

"George! if it's that, we must have the girl over!" cried Lis.

"Ridiculous! The expense! She can ask her forgiveness by post."

"We must see about that," said Lis, thoughtfully. "I'm afraid I've neglected the girl. She's very plain."

"You artists have a way of speaking I don't pretend to understand," said the Parsoness, shortly.

"We don't mean any harm. The French Baroness has sent me three photographs of an increasing—unloveliness. The child has changed completely."

"A baby would," said the Parsoness.

"I'll write about her! Do you mean to say the mother is really seriously ill and wants to ask her forgiveness?"

"As well she may for making her Christian child a Papist! But that is your sin, your very great and grievous sin, Lis—not hers!"

So Lis wrote, against his will, to Yetta, having convinced himself that the drunken mother's mental agony was even worse than the physical. The days passed by. He had an Englishman and his wife and two Germans, all fellow-artists, staying in the house. He began a picture of Saskia, and was soon hard at work over it, a strong presentation of sensuous womanhood. He had hung up his landscape on the bleak wall of the study. He would lie for hours alone, in "Abraham's Bosom," gazing at the picture, with feelings of exultation and of anguish, interminably blended and interminably new.

The reply came from Yetta. The girl's education was completed. They had been debating at the Convent, what to do with her, hoping for some inquiry from her foster-father, Lis. She might go as a nursery-governess, preferably in Holland, where her French would be of value. Of course she could first see her mother, if that was desirable. At the Convent she was (Yetta guessed) rather in the way.

Lis wrote for them to send the girl, also to the Parsoness, who was eager to un-pervert her. The second half of Yetta's letter cost him very different care and thought. "My husband's days," she wrote, "are numbered. A terrible illness has been steadily increasing upon him from which there is no escape. The doctors tell me he may live a year. He does not know this nor as yet does he suffer much. But he is miserable beyond what I can bear to behold, and he frets.

"Lis, I cannot help myself, I am writing by this post

to Job Boonbakker, bidding him come here. I believe he is the person Odo likes best; he is certainly the person he needs most at this moment, on earth. It is true that life was unendurable for me formerly with that man in the house. But death changes everything. Let Odo die in his arms, if he will.

"And, the other day when I think he was wandering in his mind, from an overdose of chloral, he said something about Job's bringing him from Holland his one supreme happiness before he died. For he talks of dying, though he doesn't know how true it is. He said afterwards, when I asked: Yes, it was so. Job has a picture at Aldervank, which is finer than anything Odo has ever shewn. The supreme happiness he meant is the exhibition of this picture which Odo has always kept back, to the art-world, the final reply to the reproach and the wonder that he couldn't paint any more. How I understand and share the feeling! Poor fellow! I am so happy for him! And for myself."

A whole night passed after Lis received this letter. Then, in the morning, before his guests were stirring, he slipped into the old Dominé's study, and unhooked the picture, and packed it, and sent it, without a word of explanation, to Mynheer Job Boonbakker at Aldervank House.

XLIII

"WHEN are you going to do some more of me?" demanded Saskia, courageously turning the corner.

Lis started: he flung what was left of the bread to the birds.

"It's more than a week since you've worked," continued Saskia, "and this is a gloriously fine morning to paint in."

"It's a much finer morning to feed sparrows," said Lis.

"Feed sparrows by all means: they do more harm than good: they've a right to grow plump."

"Hu-roosh!" cried Lis to the sparrows, who fluttered off on all sides, and came back.

"Yes, that's no use," said Saskia. "Come into the studio. The picture is really very good."

"No, it isn't. It isn't any good at all."

Saskia cried to the guests, who were scattered over the little lawn—the English couple and the two Germans. English, more or less broken, was the "medium."

"It is beautiful weather; a picnic would be very pleasant," replied the one German, thin. The other, stouter and kindly, called out, as they all came forward: "No, no: it is the morning to work. The portrait must be ended! It is excellent!"

"You remember what my father always said," urged Saskia in Dutch. "'You can know the value of an artist by the work he leaves unfinished and the work he again takes up.'"

"So be it! Let me leave mine unfinished."

"We know your value: *this* you must again take up."

"Forwards!" cried Lis, with a laugh.

The entire party swept him into the big studio, which he had constructed out of one whole side of the house (annihilating the Parsoness's sanctum), from ground-floor to roof. A locked door led from this fine apartment to the study, in which nothing now remained but the deserted sofa. Clasine had vainly petitioned for permission to clean it.

"Let the dust accumulate there!" said Lis.

In the studio all six, including Lis himself, inevitably began talking shop. Saskia stopped first.

"Nobody could paint in this way," she said, settling herself amongst her deciduous draperies. The Englishman flung himself into a long chair with his London paper: his wife and the two Germans stood toying with prints. Suddenly Lis seized his brushes and began working and whistling for dear life.

He stopped the whistling, with a jerk.

"Do go on!" said the Englishwoman, a tall woman whose sweet face was a little too Burne-Jonesy. "Is that a Dutch national air?"

"No, it's the Lorelei," answered Lis, "German."

"Oh, of course German music is the best," said the Englishwoman amiably to the short German with the spectacles.

"And German bainting," remarked the thin Teuton.

"Oh, are you sure? French painting is very good just now," objected the Englishwoman courteously.

"Holland bainting is German bainting," explained the other, grinning.

"Protest, Lis!" cried Saskia.

The Englishman looked up from his paper. "In 1920," he said, "twenty-five air-ships will unship twenty thousand men each at Croydon."

"Oh, poor Mamma!" cried the Englishwoman.

"She'll be dead before then," answered her husband hopefully. "That's an appalling contingency to look forward to."

"Alger non, don't be humorous."

"I was alluding to the invasion, my dear girl. You can read all about it in the paper."

"No, thank you. I can wait," said the calmer consort.

"Air-ships indeed!"

"It is Wells? Your Jules Verne? Ah, *very* good!" put in the stout German.

"No, indeed. It's serious sense. All they need is an air-rudder. There's a man in your country—I forget his name—making them." The Englishman crossed his feet and lit a too early pipe.

"Ah—Zeppelin?" said the thin German. "But he has made nothing as yet."

"It is a pity," said the stout German thoughtfully, "that the English have never known the horrors of an invasion, at home, like the Frenchmen, and we! If so, they would wish for peace."

"Do you know—that might be true," nodded Lis.

"Nonsense!" remarked the Englishman, "we have conquered half the world, and it's a pity we haven't conquered the other half."

He added: "A pity for the unconquered half, I mean."

And again he added: "Not for us. We've all we want."

"Alger non, I think you've said quite enough," remarked Alger non's wife. "I'm sure Miss Lokster thinks you very silly."

"Miss Lokster conquers all she wants, I'm sure—and more," retorted Alger non smiling.

"Miss Lokster thinks you sillier," said Miss Lokster.

"I believe not in air-ships!" insisted the stout German.

"You—what do you know of science?" laughed Lis.

"You thought dynamos were worked by dynamite!"

"I admit that I prefer art. The only air-ship I admire is Elijah's! Who is this exceedingly plain young female, whom I find here in three successive stages of older ugliness?" This last sentence he spoke in German: he held up three photographs, taken from a side-table.

"Those?—did I leave them there? They are the likenesses of my foster-daughter. I hunted them up the last time I was in here. Yes, she is plain. I am expecting her this morning."

"Wherefrom? Who is she? Who did you say?" cried everybody.

"My foster-daughter. Her name is Redempta Lariks. She has been educated in a convent near Paris."

"How interesting!" cried Mrs. Algernon.

Saskia said: "Will somebody shew me the photograph?"

"Yes, she is plain," said Saskia, laying it aside.

"A foster-daughter," remarked Algernon severely, "should always be plain."

"You would choose her on that account," suggested his spouse.

"When I chose her, she was pretty," said Lis. "A little more—please, Saskia! So! You are an admirable sitter."

"I'm so glad," she said, pleased.

"You must excuse me: I shall leave, Doris," declared the thin German, who had been studying the photographs. "I could not paint my nymphs with this lady in the house."

"She will stay with Mevrouw Donderbus," answered Lis, annoyed.

"I advise you not to see her often. She will creep into Fräulein Lokster's face!"

"Come, come: she is his foster-daughter," remonstrated the stout German.

"Whom he has not seen since she was a baby," mocked Saskia.

"I wish you would speak English," reproached the Englishman.

"It will have to be French with Redempta," replied Lis, throwing down his brushes. "I heard the carriage stop. I feel frightfully nervous," he said, as he walked across the floor.

"Why not receive her here? Won't it be less awkward?" advised the thoughtful Englishwoman.

Lis waited, debating the question. Clasine flung open the door and closed it violently, in proof of disapproval. Against the closed door stood Redempta.

The lofty studio shone, sunless, in grey and brown tints, like a white-windowed chapel. Here and there, amongst the unfinished canvases, too glaring on their easels, a bit of soft drapery or old furniture made a restful background. The parquered floor, with its scattered furs, showed great spaces of radiance; and here and there, between these spaces, as the girl perceived, on lounge or by table, strange figures rose, motionless staring at Redempta.

"Well, you'll know me again!" said the girl, in slang French.

"But that's just what it is: we don't know you again," retorted, in bad French, the thin German.

They saw a young creature before them, whose every movement, whilst she stood there in that awkward position, was charm, whose every line,—not an artist eye amongst them but immediately noted the fact—was grace, above all whose every feature, as she blinked beneath their scrutiny, was alive with whimsicality and retarded repartee.

But the face and the figure were not those of the photographs.

"Are you Redempta Lariks?" demanded the astounded Lis.

She dropped him a curtsy, an exaggerated, stage-curtsey.

"And this is your portrait?" exclaimed the thin German, holding up a photo.

She went off into peals of merriment, peals upon peals of merriment, that rippled and ran among the rafters of the roof.

"How well she laughs!" remarked the Englishman, using the only tongue he possessed.

"Like a bally-girl," said the Jonesy spouse. This made the Englishman laugh.

"Madame la Baronne sent you that?" cried the girl in

her brightly coloured vernacular. "Oh, how like her! She always hated me. It is Julie! La hideuse Julie! The ugliest monster of the school!" She looked round at her audience. "Dites donc que je suis mieux que ça!"

"Beaucoup mieux!" chimed all the gentlemen, even the one who couldn't speak French.

"Ah, the creature!" cried Redempta, shaking her little fist. "To go and build me the reputation of Julie la hideuse! It would make me cry much, did it not make me laugh more!"

She advanced from her place at the threshold and handed a letter to Lis. All the men watched her walk.

"Take care: the floor is slippery," said the kindly Englishwoman. Redempta cast her a pitying glance.

"Just now you called her a ballet-girl," memorised Agernon, as Lis read the letter. "You were right."

This is what Lis read. "I have given you portraits as ugly as the portrait you gave me. Tit for tat. You will now see how disagreeable it is to live with an ugly presentment of a beautiful reality.

"P.S. Come and finish my picture."

Lis tore up the letter, very small, between his fingers. He gazed at Redempta with eyes full of wonder and pity.

"You must be tired," he said, "after your long journey. This lady will take you to your lodging. She lives there too."

"Yes, I will take you," agreed Saskia, rising and adjusting her déshabillé.

"I thank you," said Redempta, prettily. "Are you a saint? I mean, in the picture?"

"No, a goddess. Juno."

"I do not know about goddesses. It is so funny to hear you all speak such droll French."

XLIV

"ARE you also a paintress?" asked Redempta.

"No: but I do little dolls: I will shew you some."

"I do not understand," replied Redempta, humbly. "I understand nothing. It is all so new. I am very frightened."

"Dear me: I don't think we noticed that!"

"Yes, I am very frightened. I have never been out of the Convent. The School was like a Convent: we called it so. We were shut up in it, sixty girls, and the sisters. Sister Angélique, with the bad temper, Sister Volumnie, so fat——"

"Which of the sisters taught you slang?"

Redempta laughed. "We taught each other. It was so amusing to be naughty, when we had to be so good. Naughty amongst ourselves. I had my *great* friend, who came in, when she was twelve. Her mother had been an artist also, like you."

"Then *she* told you about artists," said Saskia, opening the gate.

"I believe you! She had lived in the Cafés Concerts with her mother, who sang there. She taught me a lot of her mother's songs: I will sing them to you some day, if you are kind to me."

"Thank you: I shall certainly be kind to you."

"I hope everybody will. I am so frightened. It is so strange, when one has never been outside a convent. Célestine, my friend, knew the world!" She nodded, walking along the Dutch village street with her very un-Dutch-village tread.

"Her father had been a circus-clown. Célestine said

they had never been married, but how could that be true?" She turned up her candid eyes to her tall companion. "I asked Sœur Angélique, and she said it couldn't. She made me do a penance, but she always did that."

"The lady you are going to stay with is not a bit like Sœur Angélique," said Saskia, feeling her way.

"I am so glad! I understood that I was coming among artists! Ah, how Célestine envied me! How she cried! They have kept her as 'Lingère.' But 'I will do something to make them send me out!' she cried. 'If I must, I will——' but no, I may not tell you that. Besides, it is very wrong of her. She cannot mean it. I would not have done anything wrong, not even to come among artists." She paused, to inspect a wooden-shoed child.

"The lady is not a bit like one of your friend Célestine's artists," hastily explained Saskia. They were already within a stone's throw of the house. Redempta turned, non-plussed.

"Her manner will seem gruff, but she too is really a bit frightened. She has never spoken to a Catholic in her life: she thinks such queer things about them. She speaks a very little French. But she is good."

"I too will be good," replied Redempta, with a sigh of relief. "I like being good: it makes one feel happy. I do not know about artists, except what Célestine taught me, but I know about being good."

"The lady is the mother of Madame Pareys: you know her?"

"I believe you. She often came to the School in former years—but not now for the last ten. Madame la Baronne drove her away."

"She is very handsome?" asked Saskia quickly.

"I believe you. Like the Virgin. But you are handsome too."

"Not like the Madonna."

"No. Like the Madeleine."

"Before she repented. This is the house."

"We all loved her. If her mother be half as sweet, I shall love her also. I shall love her too much."

No one possessed of the brains, or one-tenth part the brains that had fallen to Redempta's share could apply to the Parsoness, after five minutes' acquaintance, the epithet "sweet." It was true that the old lady, much aged, felt nervous about her extravagantly foreign guest. The Parsoness, like Clasine, understood only, and with the keener penetration, her own kind.

The youthful stranger, as soon as she saw her hostess, dropped, quite naturally, all the lore she had acquired from her theatre-friend, and found herself again the good girl long experience had made her. She answered, "oui, madame," and "non, madame," to the little the Parsoness was able to say to her. She was delighted with everything, her little room, the little garden, the view of the road, the few quaint passers-by. "I am always pleased, always happy," she confided to Saskia, unpacking. "See, the pretty clothes they have bought for me! I have been nowhere. I know nothing. The whole world is new!"

"Were you never away from the Convent?" questioned Saskia.

"Never one night. We went walks outside, between the asparagus-beds and glass 'bells.' It was all glass 'bellis' and asparagus-beds: the country was ugly. And the garden had high walls—high as this room!"

"But you had lessons?"

"Oh yes: we had lessons. Always. And much church. But I know nothing. I hope the artists will be good to me. I am afraid."

"She seems to have been in prison for no reason," argued the Parsoness, as far as that dour Calvinist could be made to understand. But other, acuter interests engrossed for the moment Mevrouw Donderbus. The little maid had cut, that very morning, into an exceptionally good table-cloth, and Mevrouw who, in her parish days, had neglected all such housewifery, now elected in her retreat to fuss, with a tempest

that ended in tears, and every mishap of this kind. "Though she don't know the difference," said Clasine, when told, "between damask and drugget." The withdrawal from parish work was complete, in a woman who could do nothing by halves. "Let her mess!" the Parsoness had exclaimed, when some one had petitioned for a helping hand to the new preacher's young wife. No longer "Mevrouw Dominé," the widow resigned her membership of all local committees and henceforth only interested herself in souls outside the four-mile radius of Boldam.

"I could mend this so that you couldn't find the place," suggested the little French girl timidly. The two Dutch ladies, and a couple of friends who had come in to see them (and the new-comer) smiled.

"But I could!" entreated Redempta, to Saskia. "We learnt that, and much finer work, half the time!"

"She must go and visit her mother," proposed the Parsoness to Saskia.

The girl looked up, sudden terror in her dark eyes, sudden fire on her pale cheeks.

"What? You understand Dutch?"

"A little. Madame Pareys came to teach me in former years, twice a week. Then, when she might come no longer, she sent me Dutch books. I had a Dutch 'paroissien.'"

"A Dutch what?" asked the Parsoness.

"Her prayer-book. You will be able, then, to speak a little with your sick mother?"

"I do not know. I am afraid. I do not want to see my mother."

"But that is what you came for!"

"Ah no!" Redempta clasped her hands. "I came to see Mynheer Doris!"

"Do not disturb the child: she is doing the work most beautifully," said one of the visitors.

It was agreed that Redempta, who cried and prayed and trembled, should be left to rest this one night after her long

and most unaccustomed journey. The sick and sodden parent knew of no day or hour.

"A mother? What do I need with a mother? I have no mother!" said the girl to Saskia, up in her small bedroom, half-undressed. "Ah, the lovely moonlight! Let us open wide the window! It is warm: it is good! It is beautiful to live!"

"But your mother is ill: you will be kind to her!" pleaded Saskia.

"Ah, leave me at peace with this mother! You are cruel!" cried Redempta, the tears in her flexible voice. "I knew not she existed till a few days ago! What care I? What cared she? Has she ever asked about me, sought me? Spoil not my happiness. I am happy to-day!"

"Don't speak thus! You are so alone in the world! Love the little you have!"

The girl, who had been gazing at the golden orb in its azure velvet, veered round.

"I have Mynheer Doris!" she cried. "Do you count him for nothing? It is to him I have come this day! It is he I have seen! Mynheer Doris! About him I have known all my life, since I was a baby. In those days, when she came, we always spoke of him! Often and often she talked of him, and told me how good he was, and gentle and brave! Told me, how he had bought me—bought me, do you hear? Do you listen? Did you know?"

"No, I didn't know," stammered Saskia Lokster, taken aback.

"But I knew. He bought me with his little money. He saved me. He paid for my clothes and my food as soon as ever he could. Ah, she told me. And how fine an artist he is! One that will be ever greater and greater. See, I have always known of him, and to-day, at last, I have seen him! Mon Dieu, how beautiful he is! He, whose portrait they would not give me at the Convent.

But *she* had told me. They said he was not my father! *He* is my father, my protector, my St. Michael! I wonder, could Célestine's father, the Circus Clown, have been more beautiful than he?"

She stopped, breathless. Saskia was laying out her night-things on the bed.

"You also, do you not think him beautiful?" besought the girl, violently.

Saskia smoothed the little white frill with a thoughtful hand. "I think him all you think him," she answered, forcing a smile.

"Ah no!" cried the French girl. "Ah no! Ah no!"

"More," pitilessly insisted the older woman, "because I know him more."

"But I shall know him more," exulted Redempta. "I am going to stay with him, and to serve him! I owe everything to him! I owe to-day to him! My protector, my St. George."

"You said Michael just now," remarked Saskia, quite crossly.

"Yes. I have a choice of saints, and they all have the face of Lis Doris!"

"SHE must go to her nother!" said the Parsoness next morning, and the morning after.

Redempta gazed out of window.

"In *my* day," insisted the Parsoness, clattering her cups, "a young girl, etcetera." The Parsoness had now reached that stage of existence when, to a woman of her temperament, every hour is embittered by a dream of "her day." The Parsoness's day had been one of headstrong compulsion, greatly abetted by native eloquence. Redempta understood little Dutch—less, when required. The old lady laboriously started a few words of dictionary French.

"Fi!" she said gravely, and stuck.

Redempta gazed out of window.

"Fi!" began the Parsoness again, in desperation.

"Faut!"

"Fa!" said Redempta, gazing out of window.

But to Saskia she freely confided her terrors. She was afraid of this unknown parent. She was afraid! She trembled easily.

"Let her wait a bit and come to us," advised Lis.

From the Old Parsonage garden Redempta cast timid glances farther up the road to the grocery store.

"I lived there as a little boy," said Lis quietly.

"You lived there?" she asked, amazed, dropping her racket. For the Englishwoman had at once begun teaching an apt pupil tennis. Everybody was far too kind to the girl: she gratefully and repeatedly admitted the fact. At the "Oeuvre" no one but an occasional sister-waif, and in early days Yetta Pareys, had ever been either kind or

cruel. Nor had there been games of any sort, excepting silly sing-song in a circle, with waving of arms and clapping of hands, as in an infant school.

"You lived there?" she asked.

"Certainly. All my youth. Till I was almost as old as you. It is a queer little house. I should like to see it again." Oh, Lis Doris!

"You haven't been there since?"

"No, I had no reason."

"Then you don't know"—she picked up the racket—"her?"

"Yes. But the last time I spoke to her is many years ago."

"When you bought me?"

"Yes."

Redempta was silent, studying the strings.

"All your youth?" she repeated. "As long as I have lived?"

"It must seem a long time to you," he said. "It does to me."

"Since I came here, I have wished you had seen the School. It makes all the difference."

"You must tell me more about it."

Redempta laughed. "I have already told so much. And when I talk slang, you frown. Artists are not a bit like what Célestine taught me!"

"I don't frown. It must be somebody else. *Mevrouw Donderbus*?"

She shook her head. "I should like to see the place where you have lived so long."

"Shall we go to it together?"

She waited a moment. "Yes," she said, and got up.

"Come then. I have prepared them. I knew you would be sensible."

The tears shot into her eyes, as she followed: she was disappointed in her womanliness that he had anticipated her surrender (which he had) and its cause (which he had not).

A few hurried steps brought them to the cottage. Most unwillingly Lis entered it again.

The shop was little changed, in a village where little changes. The texts hung dirty. There were far more flies than in Simeon's time among the dusty wares.

"She's in there," said the untidy "help," a grandchild of the neighbour who had slapped Lis. The help jerked her head backwards to the glass-door.

And so Lis saw the old room again, the old furniture, the old bed. It is a commonplace that our lives burn up, and the bits and sticks around them remain untouched. But commonplaces pierce deepest, from time to time. He had never felt the sentimental call to buy these desecrated chattels. The bed was the bed in which his father had lain dying by inches, had lain nursed, uncomplaining, dead. Dead, to be out of the way, that Lis Doris might become—what he was.

"So this is my dear Mary?" cried the bloated creature in the dusk. She looked as a florid woman looks after years of disorder and drink.

Redempta shrank away. It was her first sight of squalor. Sickness, at the School, had been whitewashed and deodorised.

"You needn't be afraid of me, my dear! I'm your mother, your own mother. I love you!"

"She understands very little Dutch—only a word or two," said Lis.

"What words? Love? Money? D—— me, that's all we need to get on with. I've never had enough of both."

"You don't really want for money?" objected Lis.

"Humph! Time was when it was easier to get love!" She lay back, her swelled and sore limbs beneath the dirty coverlet, her coarse face with its tangled hair scarlet against the dirtier pillow. "Hoist it up!" she said, and motioned to her daughter. Shivering from head to foot, the girl drew nearer, and, deftly enough, put the pillow in its place.

"Ah!" said the woman. "Time was when it was easier to get love!"

"Well, now she is here. We have sent for her. What have you to say to her?" demanded Lis.

Old Mary Lariks judiciously scrutinised young Mary Lariks. "Love ought to mean money to her, at her age," said the mother.

Young Mary turned inquiring eyes on Lis.

"It never did to me," continued the sick woman. "Ah, the rogue!"

"Peace!" burst in Lis, fearing, as ever, to find some clue to the girl's parentage. "Remember the time when you were a girl, and speak to this innocent girl as such!"

The sick woman, with an oath, began to weep. "She doesn't understand!" she said.

"But she might—or divine. She will come back, with the other ladies. If you want her again, or wish us to translate, be careful what you say. It was for a very different cause that you begged us to send for her."

The injured woman, unable to rise, lifted her head, hanging it, a hideous sight, in mid-air. "I want her to forgive me before I die!" she shrieked. "I want her to pray for me like them Romanists do! To pay masses for me after I'm dead!"

"We will talk of it another day," soothed Lis, taken aback. "There's plenty of time."

"Not plenty! Not plenty! You think that because you're well. When the water reaches my chest, I shall go."

The untidy help, who had been listening by the door, put her head through. "Yes," affirmed the help. "When the water reaches her chest, the doctor says she'll go."

"There's never been too much that's gone down," swore Mary Lariks. "And now there's too much coming up!"

Redempta had stood silent, staring, depressed.

"She will come back," said Lis, leading her away.

"Bring her soon!" cried Mary Lariks, as the help fell

aside from the door-way. "She's my daughter. I want her. She must pray for me. And forgive me. And pay masses when I'm dead!"

"We will bring her, if you're very careful."

"Pay and pray. Pray and pay. Pay and pay," said Mary Lariks: she let the head fall with a thud.

Outside in the silent, solemn roadway, the late August sunlight shone golden. The houses slept at distances, along the straggling street. Beyond, the peaceful fields, with here and there a drowsy cow or two, lay wrapt in a lucent haze like a heaven-filled dream of light.

Redempta heaved a palpitating sigh. It rose and sank, with its young weight of anguish, from the depths to the depths of her being. The man beside her had never heard so grievous a sob.

"I—I don't want to go home just yet," said Redempta.

"Come to us. Mrs. Ransom will give you tea!"

"Oh no, no! Not to other people! I want to go away into the country! May I for an hour or two? Please!"

"You cannot go alone."

"Come with me then! Just for a little! A little! Till I have found my senses again!"

She was so utterly disconcerted and distraught, she ran up a by-road, away from the houses. He followed her: he caught up with her in a clump of scrubby firs.

"I am so stupid," she said. "You cannot understand. It is so strange. I have never seen anything. Never anything. In the Convent nothing ever happened, nothing at all. I do not know, except what the girls told me, and they told me wrong. What the sisters taught me is no use: what the others taught me is bad use: you understand? It is very sad!" She shook her head, gravely. "Now this—this house! I have never seen any house but the Convent, and yours and ours."

"But you like your room," he suggested.

"It is lovely: you are all too good to me. But, see! I had never beheld ugliness! There was nothing ugly at

the Convent, except Sister Volumnie's face—that is different. And there was nothing beautiful."

"You have flown out of your cage," he said brightly.

"Oh that house! That woman! Are there many such in the world?"

"Hush, hush! She is your mother!"

The girl stamped her foot. "You speak like Saskia. I have no parent. Unless——"

"But that leaves you so alone in the world."

"Like Saskia again! I will be alone in the world then. There is no 'un-ess'."

She paused and looked about her. "It is a hideous world to be alone in! It is a beautiful world."

"Well," he said cheerfully. "I am alone in it too."

"You? Ah, you are famous. You are honoured! Many love you. You!"

"They will love you also," he encouraged her. "People like loving. It is quite an easy thing to be loved."

She shook her head. "It is a much easier thing to love," she said wisely. "These trees—what is their name? I have never seen such trees."

"Why, they are common firs."

"Do not laugh at my ignorance, or I shall not dare to ask you. And I want to ask a thousand things, all day long. Can I help it? I have never seen nature. There were not these trees in our garden. We had trees with broad points, like fingers, and flowers in spring, like candles."

"Chestnuts?"

"It may be: the Sisters called them trees. And outside, in our walks along the roads, were trees that trembled, and asparagus everywhere, and bells. Have you bells?"

"How so—bells?"

"Des cloches. Miles and miles of them, and the 'primeurs' growing under them, at times, said the sisters, that the good God did not intend."

"No, nothing ever grows in Holland at times that the good God did not intend."

"I do not understand about the good God." She walked on. "He was always doing what the sisters wanted. Célestine laughed at their good God. She said he was puppet of the sisters. The artists, she said, knew there was none."

"The clowns—the clowns only," said Lis quickly, "and the dancers. Not the artists who try to paint little bits of His robes."

She looked perplexed. "You are laughing at me?"

"No, by—all that I reverence," he said. "Shall we not go back?"

"Not just yet, need we? May I go to the end there beyond the trees, where the light is?—no farther!"

"That is just where I don't want to go."

"Why not?"

"Because there is something there I don't want to see. I haven't seen it for a week or two. Not since I resolved, recently, never to see it again."

"We will turn," she said, stopping.

"No, no: push on now!" he cried, excitedly. "Only a few steps more! There it is! See!"

They had come to the end of the small fir-wood. It opened out suddenly. Before them spread, ablaze with purple and silver, the endless ocean of heather and sky.

Redempta cried aloud and then stood gasping, in quick, clear breaths. "Oh, is the world as beautiful as that!" she said. "Oh, is the world as beautiful as that?"

"None of it is more beautiful," replied Lis. His voice was a man's, but it, also, shook.

Together they stood gazing, gazing. Before them spread motionless, in its still blaze of purple and silver, the unbounded ocean of heather and sky.

"In the train," whispered Redempta, "when the sun rose, there was nothing but fields. Nothing in all one's life to make one think of this!" She ran forward among the tall plants, dropping and dipping as she hastened: she

passed her hands along the blossoms and caught her arms in the wiry enlacements of root and creeper and entangling twig.

"Mind! Mind! You will slip!" he cried.

She neither heeded nor heard, but even at that moment, leaping at a rabbit already captured, she flung sideways and fluttered down among the softly scratching masses of colour that half-hid her white frock in the fall. He was beside her: he wanted to raise her.

"No, no," she said, breathless. "Let me lie!" The tears were in her eyes and on her cheeks: there was laughter about the curves of her sweet little mouth. She looked up to him, pressing her hands tight against her bosom. "It hurts!" she said. For a moment he thought she had done herself some injury.

"But no!" she answered, almost impatiently. "It is so small, and the world so enormous. Surely the world is too big for so little a heart as mine."

"When people find their hearts too little, it is always because they are too big," he made reply.

She sat gazing at the miles and miles of radiant splendour before her.

"It is your heart must be too little," she said at last, in a far-away voice. "To live near this glory and not to live in it."

He smiled.

"I mean not to live in it with your soul."

The smile died away from his face: it went white.

It was as if she felt that her words had hurt him. For she glanced up from her bed of crushed bronze and lilac, glanced up, a white little pleading figure, with eyes that swam lustrous in swift passion and regret.

"I am wrong," she said. "I've no business to say things. At the School we always spoke our thoughts to those we loved, you see—never to anybody else."

"You must speak your thoughts to me."

"Yes, one feels there are no spies here. It makes one

reckless. At the School we were all spies. They made us I would not. I was not happy at the School."

"Well, now you are going to be happy here," he said reproaching himself violently for his neglect of her. He might have known that these convent schools were three quarters penitentiary, under their fair soft whitewash and melodious bells.

She had got up. Her eyes were riveted on the distance.

"I may speak, then, my thought!" she burst out. "I can keep it back no longer. It is this. I have understood what you mean by the bits of the robe of God. That you can live here and see this and not live in it to paint it, to live it again in your heart and in your work, to show it to all men as beautiful as it is, and more beautiful—see, *that* I cannot understand! But I understand nothing: I know nothing; it is a Convent thought? In the Convent I was always thinking. It is foolish to think, when one cannot judge, when one knows not. You must forgive me. When one says not one's thoughts to some one, as I said them to Célestine, one—bursts!"

"Let us go home," he answered.

He turned, resting his vision on the firs. It was a relief to be amongst these again, in their close verdure, with the change of atmosphere from silvern to gold.

"Are you tired?" he said. "I want to get back."

"No, I am not tired," she answered, following meekly. "I am never tired here. Why, we get up at eight!"

The Parsonage, by the time they got to it, was deserted. The others, tired of waiting, in the long height of the cloudless afternoon, had taken the cart and the handy man and wandered forth. It was their last day at Boldam. The Englishman said God Almighty had made Scotland for August or August for Scotland, he wasn't sure which. And already August was half its original length. The thin German said: if you talked about the intentions of Providence, why were the nearest good beeches as far off as Aldervank? The fat German was contented everywhere.

"The tea is undrinkable, of course," declared Lis. "Can you make tea?"

"I can nothing. Shall I go for Saskia, who makes it so well?"

"Oh no!"—the cry pleased her. "I want tea. Find Clasine and tell her to make for me the tea that she says I mayn't drink!"

The old housekeeper, grumbling, brought the black liquid, with lemon and rum.

"Do them folk," she said, jerking her cap at "the impossible Frenchy," "drink tea too in a glass?"

"They drink coffee, like you, but the coffee's good," replied Lis, who unreasonably humoured her. "And tea only when they're ill."

"You'll be ill, when you drink that," opined Clasine, departing. "You were last time." She rolled away.

"On the contrary, 'tis the nectar I need," exclaimed Lis, in French—his bad French. He poured out the stuff.

Redempta made a wry face.

"You don't like it?" asked Lis.

"It is not 'en contraire' but 'au contraire,'" replied Redempta. "May I tell you? Because if you go to Paris, I could not bear it, that people should laugh."

"I never go to Paris."

"You never go to Paris? And Madame lives there!"

He did not ask what Madame she meant, and she, startled, did not seek to enlighten him.

He sat drinking his tea and staring moodily at the rose-bed in front of him. Or perhaps it was not moodily for, though his brows were heavy, his lips were light.

Affrighted and quiet under the cloud of a growing uncertainty, Redempta cowered in her low wicker chair, and drew pensively from her pocket one of the many bits of wonderful flimsiness with whose agile creation she delighted all the ladies of the neighbourhood. Her fingers danced among the threads.

The few fine trees of the garden rose around them,

excluding every prospect, except the blue dome above. Between these the hot air lay heavy upon grass and flowers. In the corner by the tea-things nothing stirred. Only Redempta's fingers, with their monotonous rhythm.

A cart rattled by, going fast. It had come: it had gone: there was silence.

Then Lis sprang to his feet.

"Before it be too late!" he said aloud. He ran, and one runs who is pursued, into the studio.

He came out with his painting-things. She watched him as a dog watches, all dumb appeal. But the dog has a tail to wag.

"Oh, come if you like," he said ungraciously.

She jumped up: she wanted to help carry. She hastened with him along the same path again, through the firs, through the shade, into the wide open, the brightness, the lightness, the view!

"Be still!" he said. "Leave me alone!" She felt, as she shrank aside, that she had not deserved the admonition. Perhaps he felt it also, for he asked her to help him with his easel.

And then he began drawing—sketching, in water-colour: he worked feverishly, with hot reminiscence of such work, over yonder, on the Aldervank side, nearly twenty years ago. He worked on: could he still do anything but human faces? Oh well, fashionable portraits, of course, need appropriate surroundings, but everybody's interest centres in the face. Could he do it? Could he get the focus? get the colour? He washed out: he began, feverishly, again.

"Won't you sing?" he said apologetically. "It is so quiet. I should like you to sing."

She was busy over the flowers she had gathered, humming inaudibly, like a bee. Without lifting her head, she began—

"Au jardin de mon père
Les lilas sont fleuris:
Tous les oiseaux du monde
Viennent y faire leurs nids."

Her gaze wandered over the wide wilderness of tints, as if she had found some fitness in the thought of her singing:

"Au jardin de mon père
Les lilas sont fleuris :
Tous les oiseaux du monde
Viennent y faire leurs nids."

"I understand about the bits of the garment of the Bon Dieu," she said to herself, proudly, again and again. Askance, she watched the man at the easel.

"Is that one of the songs of Célestine?" he demanded.

"Yes: is it not pretty? It is an old French song, very old. Her mother sang it."

He worked on. "Sing again. You help me."

"Après de ma blonde
Qu'il fait bon, fait bon dormir.
Après de ma blonde
Qu'il fait bon dormir!"

"That is the chorus: is it not pretty? Célestine said it was *épatant*, when the whole audience fell in."

He turned to look at her. Her clear gaze met his own.

"Very pretty," he said, and worked on. Worked on till he stood away once again from the result of all this labour, and, snatching at it, tore it across.

"Oh!" she cried. He veered round, vexed with himself, vexed with her. She had twined garlands of the heather: she had wreathed her brow and her breast.

"Stop like that!" he exclaimed. "Sit still. Wait a moment. Let me select. Turn a little. So. Were you ever painted? No, of course not. It is tiresome. Sit like that. Take the unfinished piece in your lap!" And calmly, with the firm hand of a master, he began sketching the first outlines, marking the pose. The slow sun sank, lingering, in the heavens. She sat, hushed, the long garland around her, the unfinished festoon in her lap.

It was only a sketch, hastily filled in and coloured.

At last, when the night stopped him, he desisted unwillingly with a sigh.

They took the drawing back with them. At the Parsonage gate stood the foreigners and Saskia, ready to laugh and chaff.

Before Lis had bethought himself, Redempta, in his eagerness, had undone and displayed her presentment.

All cried out in admiration.

"The heather is beautiful," said the Englishwoman.

They stood gazing at the heather-bright picture, at the heather-decked maid.

The thin German had concentrated his attention on the painting.

"The heather," he said, "is even better than the head."

XLVI

A BROTHER-ARTIST entered the studio of Jacob Raff.

"A new thing under the sun!" he cried. "Lis Doris has replied that he couldn't have me!"

Jacob Raff, very old for his age, though barely seventy, very worn, with long white hair and beard, turned from his perpetual labour at the easel, but without laying down his brush.

"I hope he isn't ill?" he asked, anxiously.

"No, indeed: I wish we all had his health. He writes that he is hard at work—too hard, and must have the house empty. He, who always telegraphed, to every one: 'Welcome!'"

"I am glad he is hard at work," said Raff, gravely. "He has never worked as hard as he ought to. He has never done the best that he might do. One feels that when one talks with the man. Afterwards he goes off and paints his good portraits. Oh, very good portraits. He has mastered the technique." Jacob Raff flung a brave stroke of black under his boat.

"Rembrandt painted good portraits," said the younger artist.

"Yes. When Doris paints such portraits I shall no longer complain."

"You have always expected too much from him," said the man who painted sheep, superciliously. "Have you a cigarette?"

Old Jacob violently thrust back his stool. He began to pace the floor with impatient little jerks.

"Do I expect too much as a rule," he burst out.

"By no means. Here's an exception."

"Well, in this case up to the present moment I have expected far more than I've got. But I'm waiting. And hoping against hope."

"Nonsense. The man must be forty."

"Artists of the type of Lis Doris live not by years but by emotions."

The other painter—of course it was Herrig—smiled.

"What!" cried the impetuous old man. "Come!" he said. He led the way through the door to the only other apartment he possessed, his big, bare bedroom. "Look there!" he commanded, imperious and annoyed.

On a blank piece of wall, tinted grey, hung the sketch of Simeon Doris.

"It is full of faults," declared Herrig, after slight scrutiny.

"It was done when he was seventeen and had had no lessons at all."

"Pardon me: in his youth, as we all know, he had lessons from Odo Pareys."

"True," admitted Raff, a little crestfallen. "I suppose so. I meant before he had been through any course."

"Why, although their subjects are so different, you can clearly trace the influence of the teacher. His stroke is extraordinarily like that of Pareys."

"Extraordinarily," said Jacob Raff, darkling. "I cannot understand about Pareys." He shook himself, as one who casts off some intolerable, unavailing burden.

"What do you not understand?"

"A great painter who—doesn't paint."

"To me——" Herrig laughed—"there is more than sufficient explanation. Indolence, ill-health and plenty of money."

"I have the two latter."

"And I the former only. But your absolute lack of that neutralises the rest. There are men who work a tread-mill, rather than to sit still."

"Thank you," smiled Jacob, his eyes on Lis's sketch.

"You know, Jacob, you have no greater admirer, amongst all the thousands, than me."

"I know. Can you imagine that in a world where there is so much to do, human folly could have invented the treadmill? It makes one sick to think of. *That sketch*" — he nodded at the worn dead face—"shews that all great work, with some natures at least, needs personal impulse, an electric ignition from somewhere, deep down. Not with all, perhaps? Well, I for one couldn't paint my fisher-folk, if I didn't so——" his voice dropped, "frantically and foolishly admire them." He moved to the door. "Let's get back to my work! Why do you make me talk about art, when you know as well as I that all the truths we utter sound like nonsense? Don't let's talk. Let's work." He settled down to his easel with a sigh of content.

"You want me to go away?" questioned Herrig.

"No, don't do that. Keep me company."

"You like company? Why, you live alone for months."

"Yes, that's why I like company. There's very good tobacco in that jar."

Herrig filled and finished his pipe.

"Look here!" he said. "I'm tired of watching you paint so much better than I can. I must talk a bit now and then."

"Some men are that way," replied old Jacob, pointing his brush at the clock. "I give you five minutes. After that, give me ten."

"An unselfish arrangement! We were speaking of Pareys. You haven't seen this new picture?"

"No: how could I?"

"One is never *sure* you are in your den. I have seen it. I came back from Luchon the other day:—my old rheumatism—I came by Paris. They have hung it all by itself, in the little room at Bodenheimer's. It is undeniably very fine!"

"It would be," admitted Raff.

"The effect of the mist against the heather is amazing. 'Heat on the Heath!' But more amazing still is his long secrecy. The picture must have been painted years ago. And he's never done anything since. And now he shows it."

"Yes: very extraordinary," said the old man. "Four minutes!"

"Jacob, you are an unconscionable old bear. I am going off"—he got up.—"The strangest thing of all is that he is dying. He has waited to shew it till he knew his days were numbered."

"He is dying!" cried Raff, and dropped the brush.

"Oh, I'm sorry I upset you! I hadn't the faintest idea you'd care about Pareys."

"I do not—care about Pareys. You didn't upset me," answered Jacob crossly. "I often drop my brush. Go away."

"I am going. But I had wanted to ask you—in fact it was what I came about—whether you didn't think we Dutch artists might do something?"

"Do something?"

"My dear patriarch, don't catch me up so. I shall never have the courage. You look like an undersized Elijah. And I am as frightened as Ahab."

"The comparison is yours," said Raff, with a grim smile.

"He is dying. In pain. His pictures are few—far too few—but they are splendid. The French have honoured him. We have done nothing. I thought an address——"

"Pooh!"

"I admit it's not much. All depends on the signatures. And why not do more? A word from you to the minister?"

"What?" shouted Jacob. "From me?"

"You wouldn't shout like that, if you'd seen this last picture."

"I should shout all the more," declared Raff.

"My dear Jacob, you are unreasonable. Pareys is

bad enough, but you are worse. If that thing you are busy at were not so exceedingly beautiful, I should be rude to you. As it is, I say: go your own way, and God bless you. If you don't want to please Pareys, don't."

"I don't," said Jacob.

He painted on in solitude, gazing out of his immense window at the sea and the sands and the fisher-folk, gazing as he had gazed well-nigh fifty years, and would gaze till his eyes were dim. He painted on in solitude but not in silence, for impatient exclamations burst from him, as he worked.

After his day's task was over, he summoned up reserves of resolution to write a letter. He would rather paint a huge canvas than pen a note.

"MY DEAR LIS," he wrote, "I am glad to hear from Herrig that you are working hard. Don't slow down for anybody. Work harder. Do better things than you have ever done. We all can. Don't accept the foolish talk about limitations. Of course we have limitations. But we've no business to know them. And we don't."

"I hear that Pareys is dying. In some paper I saw the other day that he has a son, about twenty. I hope the lad is a comfort to his mother."

"JACOB RAFF."

"Yes," said Lis, "I hope the lad is a comfort to his mother!" He laid aside the letter and went on with his picture. It was a rainy day in the bright changes of a clear autumn. For once he worked indoors.

Redempta sat beside him, sorting engravings. He had asked her to put the numbers right. Any semblance of usefulness delighted her. When she complained of her ignorance, she now found universal assent. It was indeed appalling. She seemed to have learnt nothing at all but that marvellous needle and fancy-work. The Parsoness especially joined astonished hands and told all

the neighbours. There was not the slightest possibility of her going as a governess, or as anything but a domestic in Holland. She herself made no plans, having never been taught to will, or decide. At present she considered *sh* did her duty, by performing whatever was required of her and more than her duty, by offering to go and sit with her mother. That mother was the terror of her thoughts and still more, of her dreams. Sometimes the help would come running late at night. "Her mother was screaming for her to come and pray!" She hurried along through the clammy Dutch mist. Her mother was dying. Her mother (a Protestant) had no faith in mild Protestant prayers. Redempta must come and help her into heaven!

"Not after ten," said Lis Doris.

Redempta, with circles under her eyes from a brief sleep haunted by yells, Redempta sat tranquilly classifying prints. These were her hours of happiness, out on the heath or more rarely in the silent studio, with hardly a sound throughout the empty house. The whole village of course strongly disapproved. Saskia would come after a time and smilingly fetch her away to her lessons, for Saskia was teaching her to spell French.

He took up his cup of tea and lingeringly drank it. That was her chance of a talk. She held up a sheet.

"I think it's a lovely face. Don't you?" she questioned eagerly. "I have been looking at it ever so long. I wish everybody were lovely. There oughtn't to be an ugly person anywhere. Ugly persons have ugly sons."

"Not always," he smiled.

"Always those I have met. And the beautiful souls always were beautiful. Is not the face as the mirror? Behold now the eyes of Saint Catherine! One can see she is a saint."

He looked, to please her.

"Well, of course," he said, "she was a *very* good woman. I have been to Siena. It is an exquisite place. Full of her still."

She screamed with laughter. "But it is not Catherine of Siena," she cried. "Do you not see the wheel?"

"I do now," he said. "It's rather small. And I'm afraid I'm not so very certain about my Catherines. The other has a ring."

"Of course the other has a ring. But this is the king's daughter of Alexandria, whose body was carried by the angels to Sinai. Why, she was beheaded in 307. St. Catherine of Siena died in 1380 and was canonised in 1461 by Pope Pius II. Oh, how could you think they were the same!" She laughed again, loudly.

"It was stupid of me, I confess."

"Oh, it was! Why, you might have thought it was St. Catherine of Bologna, the Poor Clare, who was canonised in 1712 by Pope Clement XI."

"I might certainly, but I think, if I had looked, I should have known about the wheel."

"I should have liked to see the home of St. Catherine of Siena. She was wonderful. She lived from her twentieth year on bread and herbs and later on the Sacrament alone. She was a dyer's daughter. I don't even know whose daughter I am: do you?"

"No," he said abruptly. "It doesn't matter. What's the good of a dead father? Tell me some more about these saints. What a lot you know of them. Who's this?"

"Why, St. William, of course, don't you see the armour?"

He led her on: he found there was one subject at least which she had been taught and re-taught in its tiniest minutiae. Its money-value, in her present surroundings, was small.

"They are beautiful stories," he said at last. "I don't think Mevrouw Donderbus would care about them. You must tell me some more to-morrow. And often. It will be the second secret between us. This is yours."

"Yes," she said, happier than she had been since she came. "I am not so stupid then. I will teach you."

"And you keep my secret well?"

"Should I not?" she replied, hurt. "They would slay me like St. Catherine, ere I told what you paint in the hidden corner, on the heath."

"You keep a good look-out. You see, I once promised never to paint the heath again. The condition of my promise no longer exists."

"Then why keep it secret?"

"Oh, that is another matter. Already, what I have just told you now, I have never told to any living creature. I have so wanted to tell it to some one. And now I have suddenly told it to you."

Her cheeks glowed. She could not speak. She turned over the prints.

"I must paint a lot more before I leave," he said. "I must do a couple more sketches of you."

"Leave!" she cried.

"Later on. My portraits are waiting. I have already thrown over two commissions."

"Leave? When do you leave?"

"I have to go to the Hague for the winter."

She began weeping. He tried vainly to soothe her.

XLVII

IT was true that Pareys lay dying. But alas for us, our lives are so short, and our dyings often take so long!

He lay dying of slow pain, at the age of sixty-five. The man he had loved and beaten, the woman he had loved and tortured—loving in his own way—these were with him, nursing him with equal devotion, from sunrise to sunrise, in the lingering light and dark.

And his son abandoned the gay life of a young man about town—the brightest and happiest town in the world—abandoned it to sit for hours by the bedside, telling the brightest and lightest of news. Alex Pareys had hitherto enjoyed existence, fully and freely, without more than a moment's thought for suffering or mischance. It was a favourite theory of Odo's that a parent, having selfishly pitched a child into the world, could never do enough to atone for that primal wrong. As a result, Alex from earliest infancy, had found his pathway strewn with flowers from a father's careful hand. He had walked along it pretty straight considering. Neither virtuous nor vicious, with a faultless constitution, and a prepossessing appearance, he laughed, when the father talked metaphysics. The philosophy of life was to have a good time, till you died, very old. His was a good time—like everybody's—in that beautiful city, amongst his wealthy surroundings, in their luxurious abode. His mother tried to interest him in poor children. He gave them the penny she had given him, and listened, amused, when she told him he might have been as one of these. He was very gentle with his mother, whom he honestly loved,

despite his father's increasing scorn of all her opinions. But a woman, as father says, is a woman. And a man is a man. It sounds like a platitude: it means the whole scheme of life. The woman is just a woman, that man may develop the man. Man is the object of creation. The whole world exists for Alex Pareys.

It was horrible, but not unnatural, that his father, being very old, should be struck down. Some other men had better luck and lived longer. It was horrible beyond words, oh, most horrible—the tears stood in his forget-me-not eyes—that so gentle a creature should suffer such agonies of pain! The son had never seen the father angry, never heard a rough word, only raillery,—or as he in his own heartlessness called it: fun. When Odo stung Yetta, Alex innocently laughed. His father's affectionate indulgence he rewarded with immense admiration, of the genius, the gentleman, the man. He was proud to be the son of the painter: so much he keenly realised. And he accepted, without reasoning, the munificence of the hedonist, the entertainment of the wit. Undeniably his father was a very jolly father. He adored him.

So he left all the delights to which he had been accustomed till he needed them, and sat down by the bed. His mother, her fond fingers in his wavy black hair, drove him forth, for his ride in the Bois or some special distraction. He had taken to motoring madly. It was still quite a new sport: it filled much of his workless life. In many ways he was still a child, inexperienced, untouched, even there, with the whole city surging around him. He had lived too much under the shadow of his father.

"Go out for a run!" urged his mother.

He got up unwillingly and went.

The sick man turned his head to gaze after him—to gaze at the door he had closed. The lofty room was dim with a lightly sinking November evening. Outside, against the window, the faded leaves hung glittering in the damp.

Outside was the death of the year, where at least it dies glittering, in Paris.

The sick man lay silent and thoughtful. A paroxysm of pain had passed from him an hour ago, and left him very tired. The room was shaded with dark green hangings and old black furniture. It was done up, in the French manner, like a sitting-room: a Cordova screen stood before the door of the white Cabinet de toilette. Yetta sat by the wood-fire, thoughtful and silent too. Odo sighed.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked his wife.

"Oh no, thank you."

Five minutes later Job entered with a cup of *consommé*.

Yetta rose. "Let me see if he has made it right this time?"

"I have seen to that already," said Job.

"Shake up my pillow, you stupid. Can't you notice how flat it is?" said Pareys.

Job obeyed and withdrew.

Yetta stood for a moment by the bed.

"Do you feel better now? Are you very tired?"

"I am not tired at all. I feel very well."

She went back to the fire, and sat down, but not before she had glanced at the thermometer.

Odo watched. "Shall I ring for Job?" he asked, his finger on the electric cord.

"No. It is exactly sixty-three." She looked down at her hands—that delight of their artist friends: they hung useless in the glow.

"I am glad you sent the boy out," said Odo.

"He needed it. Shall I read you the 'Figaro'?"

"No: that is a pleasure for him—and for me."

"You seem pretty well. Shall I play you that fifth French suite of Bach?"

"Thank you, no. The boy played this morning. That gift he has from you."

"Oh, I just tinkle."

"I know, and he plays admirably. And his violin is

more difficult than your piano. And you have a big soul and he has—just a healthy one. There's a lot of rubbish talked about music and soul."

A flame from a half-burnt log had begun to whistle. She pushed it into the blaze.

"Would you close the sitting-room door?" he said. "I want to talk. While I can. The boy has been the great link between us."

She did not deny it: the words came as an echo of that unforgotten evening, so many years ago, at Aldervank.

"The boy and Lis Doris," he continued. "Each in his own way."

Now she answered. "That also," she said quietly "is true."

"You are frank." He drew a deep breath.

"What is the use of a useless lie, Odo?"—her voice was weary—"I should not have married you, as I honestly told you at the time, had you been a poor man. I did not love you enough for that."

"No—you loved Lis Doris enough to marry me."

"Dear husband, why say these things, with the boy as the long link between us? They are not even true and they make you, who already suffer so much, unhappy."

"No, no: they do not make me unhappy!"

"Are you sure? They certainly agitate you. I admired you, when I married you. I have admired you much more since."

"Admired!" he repeated. She was silent: then she said with an effort:

"I have loved you. Loved you for your splendid painting, your world-wide fame."

"Admired! Admired!" he interrupted. "No woman loves for that!"

"Loved you," she continued quickly, "for the soul that is in that painting. The soul that you must possess, though you always try to hide it under mockery. Persiflage has been your misery, Odo: you have made it into a second nature, but

I have seen behind the mask. Seen behind it as I watched you watching Alex. Seen behind it, above all, in those Dutch paintings. The soul in those paintings, that you bury out of sight, is a beautiful soul!"

"Ah!" he said, and a spasm crossed his worn face. "You love me for the soul in those paintings? Not me, then, but the soul in those paintings. Remember that; write it down in your heart."

She turned pale. "What do you mean?" she asked anxiously.

"Nothing more than I say."

"Odo, what do you mean? Tell me what you have to tell me. Now!"

"Calm yourself. Your nerves cannot bear the strain."

"You will not?"—the words were hoarse.

He touched the bell on his coverlet. The valet came through the outer door.

"Madame wishes a glass of water," said Pareys.

"I have sometimes thought, often thought, there was some secret between you and me about your paintings. It is a doubt that has soured my life. But to question you—you will admit—with our relations, would have been unthinkable. I kept peace."

"Nor did I want to question," she added. "I dreaded the answer too much." Her eyes sought the child-portrait, in the half-light, a wonder of young beauty and charm, by Redan.

"Doubt of what?" he asked. "Doubt if I had painted them?" He laughed hysterically. "Has the heather too much soul to be mine?"

"Oh, no, no! That would be too horrible! Too horrible! Too horrible!" she cried. She covered her face for one moment with her hands: the servant came in with his tray.

She wetted her parched lips. "You are right," she said calmly. "Pictures haven't as much soul as all that. One exaggerates. As you were saying about music just now. I

have often told myself that. Often. Alex is not a sentimentalist. And yet hear him play Dvórák!"

"Still that little soul was all you loved me for," he desperately sneered.

She steadied herself, trembling from head to foot: then, with the fiercest effort of all:

"I loved you most for sacrificing your servant," she said.

"Like a woman, loved me most for the injury you did me."

"Not that—oh, God knows not that. Odo, the crisis came at Aldervank. I don't say I was right in everything, or—or even sensible. Perhaps not. Perhaps other women would—would have managed better, or wouldn't have cared! I couldn't endure it any longer. You knew how he harassed and tortured me. It had got on my nerves. Perhaps you didn't mean it so. It was like the story of the man who felt a hand on his shoulder, and when he looked round, it wasn't there!"

"Yes, I meant it so," said Odo brutally—as brutal to himself as to her.

"Meant him to torture me?" she stammered.

"Meant him to watch you."

"Thank God he went. Thank God he went," she murmured. "I was beginning to hate you."

"That would have been better!" he exclaimed.

"Odo, have you been as unhappy as that? Odo, I have honestly done my best."

"Oh yes, you have been a very good wife to me, very sweet, very patient, very considerate. But I wanted to know what you did with the money you married me for."

She opened her eyes wide: "But I told you. I bought the house."

"I express myself wrongly. I should have said: What you did with the man whom you married me for?"

She got up: she stood looking into the embers. "I do not love as you love," she said, "and therefore you are

not satisfied. I am very, very sorry. But this man whom you constantly allude to, this friend of my childhood, Lis Doris, him also I have not loved as you think." She caught at the mantelpiece. "My husband," she said, "I am so sorry for you in your suffering. I would do *anything* to lessen it, to help you in any way! Why won't you understand?"

"Anything?" he repeated, with stress.

"Surely I have not wronged you as much as you say? You—you loved me, didn't you? You wanted to marry me! And I told you frankly. I told you what the interest, the amusement of my life was. Well, you needn't be bitter with me. It has come to very little in the end."

Almost he lifted himself up on one elbow. "With what do you reproach me? With having loved you? Or with having lived too long?"

She cried out, but she turned on him. "Did you love Madame de Rossac?" she cried.

He fell back with a groan.

"Can I help it?" she hurried on, "that my loves are not as your loves, as other loves? What do you love for in your world—'*affichage*' in the worst case, elopement, in the best! What do the brutes love for? Love! Love! You all talk of the word! Ah! the apes, if they talk, use it too! Am I then to blame if I love differently? If I admire a man for what he does, what he is, and not for what he looks? You, you, do you dare lie there and answer me? For *whom* has your closest love been? For your slave!"

"For my friend!" he cried, his head close down against the pillows. "For a friend that sticketh closer than wife, ay, or son! Look at Alex: he thanks me for his pony, his motor-car! This poor fellow would die for me without reason, just because I am my own miserable self."

She stood there, silent, by the hearth, beneath the heavily falling gloom.

"Will you have the light?" she asked, at last.

"One moment!" he followed up his advantage. "What did you say just now, that you were disappointed in Doris?"

"Did I say that? He has not done the work I expected. I trust he is happy."

"All these other young men you have so secretly supported with your money since then—have they all disappointed you too?"

"Many of them have done well," she said curtly. "You have never asked me for their names."

"Acknowledge that I am discreet. Personally I do not pretend to understand this platonic interest in artists. I should not understand it in *artistes*." For a moment the old tone of badinage came back into his voice, but he was too broken-down, too wretched to keep it up.

"If all this is true," he said, "prove it, by promising me not to marry Lis Doris, when I am gone."

She started. By some impulse she could not have explained she pushed aside the screen to close the dressing-room door.

"This man has been here," she cried, "listening to all we said!"

"Why not? He knows everything," answered her husband.

She turned her back on the servant: she stood looking at the wan face on the bed.

"You have over-tired yourself," she said in icy tones. "Had I not better leave you with him?"

"Yes, but let me have your promise first."

"In his presence?" She drew up, very slightly, her proud head, still so handsome, under its golden coronal of hair.

"It is the only way to make us feel—both him and me—that we have wronged you—in our talks."

"Oh, wrong me in your talks with your servant—what care I?"

"And my talks with my son."

"You have not dared to breathe anything of this wickedness, this folly, to him?"

He smiled faintly, for the prayer in her voice showed him his strength. "Job," he said, "Give me those papers." The silent servant brought them.

"This," said Pareys, "is the story of our marriage, in a few words, for our son. And *this* is the paper I want you to sign, if you want me to tear *this* up." He held out to her the closed envelope and the open sheet. His weak arm sank: the servant caught it.

"Your swelling!" said Job.

"Give me some drops, Job! I must see this through."

"Madame!" exclaimed the servant suddenly, "he is worn out."

Yetta stood, in the dusk: only about her head a faint glimmer. Behind her the sullen glow of the sinking fire.

"It will give you rest, if I put my name to this?" she said. The quiet room rang with her contempt.

"Me and you," he made answer.

"You shall have your signature. I owe it to you for having caused you, involuntarily, this long pain of jealousy. I shall not marry Lis Doris. No one but you would have thought such a thing possible. I am an old woman. He has always thought of me as an old woman, a sort of foster-mother. A man does not marry the foster-mother of his youth."

"You are still young and handsome," he said, his eyes burning. "You are not forty-five—and you look ten years younger. Eh, Job?"

"Fair women wear well," said the servant in an undertone.

Yetta made as if she heard not. Smiling, smiling at the eager face amongst the pillows, she scrawled her name, without one droop of her unwinking eyes, across the fateful page.

As she wrote, Pareys made a brave attempt to tear the

envelope asunder. Job helped him, thrusting the pieces to the floor. She dropped the signed sheet beside them.

"And you think I should have broken my word?" she said.

"You might have forgotten that you'd given it," he diplomatically replied. And he mumbled in feeble singsong the hackneyed words: "Souvent femme varie."

"Don't, mynheer: you cannot," pleaded Job Boonbakker.

"Fol est——" His voice died within him: he fainted away.

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XLVIII

WHEN he came to himself, it was to find his faithful henchman bending over him. The room was dark, but for a shaded night-light.

"Job," he whispered, "it was worth the—the price."

"Hush," said the man.

"No: I want to talk. Why shouldn't I? Why should I lie here thinking? Why shouldn't I exhaust myself? It'll only take me longer to die."

"The exhaustion brings on the pain."

"Then you must give me more drops. Job, I believe she has liked me more than I thought." He said it eagerly, searching for the man's face in the dark. He got no answer.

"I know she never loved me—that I know," he said.

"She has been the curse of your life, curse her," said the man, violently, quite low.

"If so, that was my fault, not hers."

"You were fool enough to love her," continued the servant. "All the beginning of the misery is there. Thank Heaven, I have never wanted one woman, only the sex."

"She is right," insisted the sick man querulously. "I have been jealous. And I never noticed! A sort of Othello. A stupid black man, seeing red!"

The servant picked up the paper and laid it close to his master's hand. He noticed how thin the hand was: he noticed it every time. To his utter amazement Pareys crumpled the paper into a ball and thrust it away. "An Othello," said Pareys, almost in a whisper. "A yellow-eyed, horn-mad Othello! Or an idiot, open-mouthed Georges Dandin!"

"Madame d'Anghien was very bad," said the servant, not comprehending. "The Count's valet told me——"

"Peace, babbler! I no longer care for these stories. I only care for myself now, and my son, and a little for thee."

The servant bent over the bed. "Oh, get well!" he said. "Get well! I have prayed for you so much! Get well!"

"Fool, thou knowest I cannot. Listen, I do not want that paper. Now that she has signed it, I am satisfied. Throw it away!" Job thrust the crumpled rag into his pocket.

"And, Job, if she forgets—do not remind her. Am I a man of sense, or that fool of fools, the blatant Othello? I care not. Let her do as she likes." He dozed a little, content. The servant drew a chair within reasonable distance and sat watching.

"Job, are you there?" Odo opened his eyes. "Listen. You know as well as I that I cannot live much longer."

"Don't, mynheer, don't. Your life is in God's hands."

"Huh? Oh yes, of course. Come closer."

Job drew near. "Lower down."

The great red-faced fellow with the square shoulders, with the pale blue eyes and the pale grizzling hair, close cropped, the soft-handed valet, still an uncouth Dutch peasant, sank down heavily by the bed. The whole room was silent and shadowed, beneath the far twinkle of the lamp.

"Are all the doors closed? Listen, Job. I am not afraid to die. Shall I tell you why not? Because so very many people have died before me." The servant stooped low.

"Millions and millions and millions, you see, so how can it be hard for one more?"

"I never cared about the others," murmured Job.

"What I dread is not death but the pain. It's increasing."

"I wish I could bear it for you. But it's no use talking."

"It's no use talking. But you might help me a bit."

In the silence a bell rang downstairs. It startled them. They listened.

"Don't ask me. I can't. No, I can't," answered Job. The sick man sighed acquiescence. They understood each other easily, did master and man.

"Oh, don't ask me," cried Job. "I will gladly kill any one else for you! Gladly kill Doris!"

"Hush! Never mind. All I mean is—these new capsuloids, that the doctor says weaken the heart so—you must give them to me all the same whenever—*whenever* the pain comes on!"

"But they will do you harm."

"Harm? What is harm, you idiot? Pain is harm. Promise. No, you needn't promise; you have my orders. Give me one now. I—need—it. That was the motor. Good. Leave me. And tell Mynheer Alex to wait twenty minutes before he—comes—in."

Twenty minutes later, to the minute, Alex Pareys gently turned the knob of the door.

"Come in; I feel much better," said Odo, raising himself. "Turn on the light." He blinked in the electric glare.

"I'm glad you feel better, for I've all sorts of nice news." Alex pushed aside Job's stiff chair and drew forward an easier one.

"Let it wait a moment: I have something to say to you first. I might tire."

Alex laid down beside him a long case, and a big envelope.

"Alex, you must always be very good to your mother."

"Father, what makes you say that?" The lad's tone was anxious and hurt.

"I only mean, in after years, when I am gone, you must let her do as she likes; you mustn't cross her."

"Don't talk like that, father; it sounds as if you were going to die."

"Well, I am twenty years older than your mother. She has been good to me, always, so you must be good to her."

"Yes, you have always been an exemplary couple," laughed the son. "Not a bit like the people on the stage, or in the books."

"No, I have often teased her, and she doesn't enjoy a joke. You and I understand those better. There has been rather a grim joke in my own life, Alex. I sometimes wonder, would you understand that?"

"Tell it me," said the son.

Pareys stared into the light. "Put that out," he said slowly. "I think I could tell it in the dark."

Alex turned the lamp off.

There was a long pause. Alex could hear his father breathing heavily. "No," said Odo at last; "not yet. Let me hear your nice news first. After that. Turn up the light again. I don't like the dark."

"I want the light for my news," said Alex eagerly. "Some of it's in this round case." He pulled off the top. "I have here an address from the painters of Holland to their illustrious colleague, Pareys!"

"An address?"

"Of congratulation on your sixty-fifth birthday—only a week or two late. And in this big official envelope the bestowal of some important Dutch Order—I forget its name; shall I look?" The lad's form, voice, eyes danced with delight.

"Orange-Nassau, I suppose; they always give their lowest to artists," said Odo impatiently. "The address! Let me see the address!" His gaze rested on the scroll his son held up. "What a number of names!" he said. "Is Raff there?"

Alex searched. "No."

"Ah! Is Doris there? Lis Doris?"

A longer search. "No. Why do you just ask about those. Who is Doris?"

"Quite a good painter. But not as good as Raff."

"I should think not. Everybody knows Raff."

"Raff never liked me. And Doris hated me. *Jalousie de métier.*"

"Of course, father."

"But why all this fuss now? It's rather late in the day."

"Your 'Heat on the Heath,' father."

Pareys spoke thoughtfully. "All this fuss about my 'Heat on the Heath'!"

"And your other work. Don't pretend that you're not a great painter, father."

"And you like me to be a great painter?"

"I'm prouder than proud of you. Of course I am. How shouldn't I be, when all these Dutchmen are? All, except Mr.—what's his name—Loris."

"Doris. He painted that rather poor pastel of you that hangs in your mother's room. You seem to have taken an early dislike to him?"

"Hang the fool; what do I care?"

"Quite so. You may hang him and damn him as much as you choose. I have not the least objection. He is a most especial enemy of mine. He has done me a lot of harm."

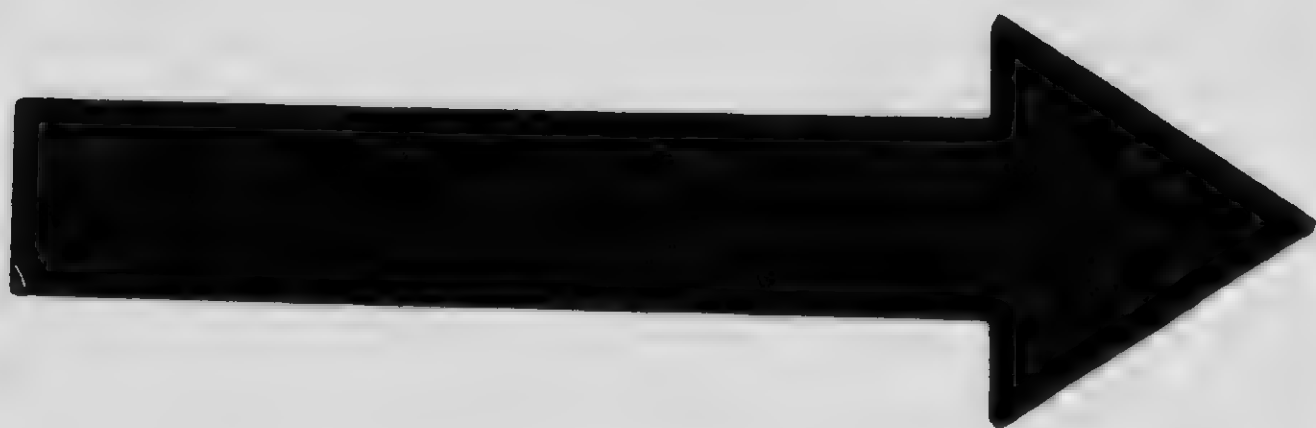
"Is that the secret?" asked Alex.

"N—n—no. Nonsense. How could it be? I'll tell you the secret some other day. It—it was only a joke, Alex. It was only about my—marrying your mother. I nearly missed that, because I wasn't sure she loved me. Stupid, eh? Now read me the names."

"The names must wait, father. I've more news. I've told Rapin—you know, the great Rapin—about your illness. I went to him. He says he has no doubt he can cure you: he's coming here to-night."

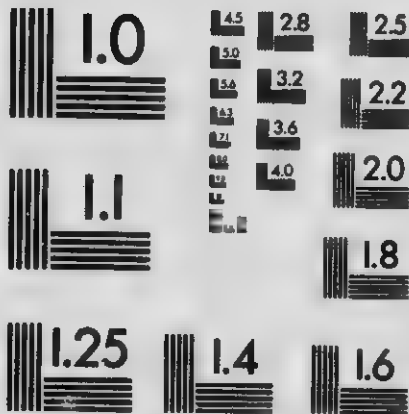
"Oh, not to-night! I'm half-dead," cried the sick man, all a-quiver.

"He can only come after hospital hours. I'll sit quiet, in the dark, till he comes."



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The house waited, listening. Downstairs, in her simple boudoir, Yetta listened and waited also. Before her lay a letter she had more than sufficiently re-read, since its arrival some days ago. Yet she left it lying there.

It was the latest from Lis. He wrote rarely, almost as rarely as she—sometimes not once in a year. But these few words of honest sympathy had been called forth by the account of her husband's alarming condition: they were simple and sincere. A second and final paragraph came after them: "Quite a new interest and delight has come into my life with Redempta. We all find her curiously attractive. I am very fond of her, and I think she is fond of me."

Yetta's eyes were on the letter. She sat listening for the doctor's carriage wheels.

It had grown late, ten o'clock, before the great Rapin was ushered into the sick-chamber. The son had sat almost motionless: the father had taken a capsule, and dozed. The enormously illustrious professor's reputation is chiefly built up upon flash claptrap and advertised fees. His colleagues know him for a quack; the public believe in him as such. He is largely employed by American millionaires, under the impression that he can cheat the only power whom they cannot cheat—Death. He smiled benignantly as this new patient—another celebrity!—opened dazed eyes.

"Narcotics?" he said. "Quite so. I allow them in moderation." Ten minutes later he left Pareys under the impression that if Rapin didn't cure him, the fault was not Rapin's. Making the incurable fancy he might cure them was Dr. Rapin's forte. It brought him in three hundred thousand francs a year.

"You see, father!" cried Alex gleefully. "You see!"

"I see, and I believe, boy! Alex, I shall owe it to you! Job! Job! I don't mind dying, but I'd rather live! Job! Let him read the address. Alex, we shall laugh at them yet, the *dénigreur*s like Raff and Lis Doris! Send

out a note to the papers to-night, Alex, to contradict all the reports about my dying. Say I've been ill, but am convalescent! Mind you say 'convalescent.' Mind you send out to-night!"

"I'll do it at once. I must go to mother. Dr. Rapin has just left her. I heard the front door."

Scarcely had Alex passed out, when Odo again fainted. It took Job nearly half an hour this time to bring him round.

Ten days later, with the tidings of his recovery still echoing through the newspapers, the famous painter was dead.

FOURTH :

CHAPTER XLIX

LIS DORIS stood still in the cold winter night. The stars—

Yes, that is the end, the cold winter night. But what matter, if the stars shine clear !

Later than usual he tore himself away from the country. You cannot go on refusing commissions. Before leaving Boldam he specially locked up the study, no longer empty by any means. He particularly recommended Redempta to the ladies she stayed with, that she might learn something towards earning her livelihood. Saskia, who was herself excellently educated, undertook to impart general information. The Parsoness promised moral instruction. Clasine said the foreign girl might come and help cook. Saskia did Greenaways. Lis paid for everything.

In the Hague, this winter, he was home-sick, weary of the club, bored—a new thing—by friends. He worked hard at his portrait-painting. A great trouble, an overwhelming trouble, befell him: his cook married. He had had her for years, and she had always managed everything. She had reasonably cheated him, and divergence of opinion on this subject with Clasine had recently caused a lot of squabbling at Boldam, which Lis wisely ignored. But no superior wisdom, active or passive, can patch up a peace between contending domestics: the cook preferred to marry

and start, on her savings, a boarding-house. For a moment Lis seriously contemplated moving into the boarding-house, then his manhood asserted itself, and he had three cooks in five weeks. He complained to Jacob Raff. "Good heavens!" exclaimed Jacob. "What can you want with a cook?"

"Doesn't somebody cook your food?" demanded Lis, rather irritably.

"No. Once a day I get something hot from the woman downstairs; but it isn't what you would call cooked."

"Well!" Lis kicked at a newspaper on the bare floor of Raff's studio. "I must say I like good food--and whatever other luxuries I can pay for."

"You are a sybarite; I don't object to that. Luxury would spoil my percipience of my fisher-life. I should approach that life from the outside, like the ladies who come to bathe. Now, you need it, for the refinement of your swell portraits."

"Don't," said Lis, again kicking the paper.

"Has that paper done you any special harm? Is it the news it contains?"

"What news? I haven't seen it."

"The great news that Pareys isn't dying at all. He has been ill and is now convalescent."

Lis took up the newspaper. "He can do some more painting, then," said Lis.

Raff, who was at work, gave a long whistle. "He ought to, with so many of his colleagues here urging him on."

Lis, who had found the paragraph, did not answer. There were more items, about other artists, that attracted his notice—he began to talk of these.

"Portraits would be endurable, if you could only choose your sitters," he grumbled. "But you can't—nobody can. Now at this moment I've Stommert, the Privy Councillor. You know the man's fat face, like a scarlet cheese. No expression but the blatantest self-conceit, and you can't put in that! I've had any amount of toil over it. The result's disgusting."

"Why don't you live on two guilders a day, and only models?"

"Two guilders is very little," answered Lis demurely.

"Greedy! Say three."

"Do you really think it's the love of gain?"

"I don't know." Raff pegged at his paints. "I don't understand about you. I never did. Of course that's nonsense about portraits. Rembrandt was often lucky in his sitters; but look at some of Frans Hals! And look at Whistler, with his modern costumes. And Sargent, with his horrible millionaires! Of course it's nonsense. You know it is."

He broke a stick in two, with his hoary energy. Then in a kinder voice—

"I grant you old Stommert and Miss Goudsmeer are inspiring," he said.

"Would you put in old Stommert's wart or leave out?" answered Lis. "He says he hasn't got one." It was not a happy laugh.

Jacob Raff stood listening to the hullabaloo of his fisher folk, as it came up to him through the great window, from the wind-smitten sands barely two hundred yards away. "You've never been into my bedroom?" he said.

"How so?"

"There's not much to see, but there's something. Go in and tell me why."

Lis went. When he came back, he was altogether laugh-less.

"Well, why?"

"Why what?"

"Why," burst out Jacob, "is that old thing a work of clumsy genius, whilst your fashionable portraits are pieces of splendid technique?"

"I don't know; do you?"

"I don't know; don't you?"

Lis stood still in the middle of the vast studio: the sights and the sounds of the winter morning came up from the sands and the sea.

"Yes, I know," he cried. "I *must* speak to some one. I can bear this torment no longer. Have the gods set limits to our strength, Raff, and no limits to our pain? You want to know what hampers me, and crushes me and stultifies me? You, my true friend, my helper! Yes, I'm lame; lamed for life. My best work is in the hands of another! All I can do is to pretend not to know that it's mine!"

"Pareys!" said Jacob quickly. He worked on, but his steady hand went wrong in a wide smear.

"How did you tell?" hoarsely cried Lis. "Who knows? Nobody knows."

"So that is what has lamed you, as you say. It is the right word, Lis. You have fought as a man fights with one hand tied behind his back. Well, don't confess more than you want to."

"I have nothing to confess. When my work was stolen from me, I kept silence. I could not act otherwise."

"Naturally. I pity you. I am glad to say I never sacrificed anything for any one. You have sacrificed everything. I hope she deserves it."

Lis did not affirm or deny. "She knows nothing," he said. "No one knows but Pareys and his servant and I."

"And I, who am a mausoleum, in which your genius lies embalmed." The old man stamped his foot. "Sdeath, there is *nothing* to be done? This lie must go on?"

"You can do me one kindness—to forget it."

"Forget? Pshaw! It will eat into my heart till it numbs my old hand. That I should live to see such a thing—such a thing in this glorious art of ours! You have ruined my Santa Claus, Lis, the brightest day of the year!"

"True, to-night is Santa Claus."

"All the fisher children come here, and I play Santa Claus to them. They never recognise me in spite of my beard."

"I should like to see that," said Lis hungrily.

"I can't admit even the parents. Oh, Lis, Lis, it is impossible, this infamy of Pareys!"

"It came about quite naturally, at Aldervank, the day you were with us—you remember? When I look back at it it seems the simplest thing in the world."

"Oh, Lis, your life!"

"I have bound myself to paint portraits only. Well, as you said just now, those are the greatest of all pictures. It's a pity mine bore me. I hate the smug sitters. It's not my line, but I must stick to it—as Lokster did to boats."

"That reminds me, I must send old Lokster his presents from Santa Claus."

"The son, Peter Paul, now looks after them. He's been made a professor in Dakota. And he paints ancestors and ancestral scenes for the seventeen royal families of Newport. Now, there's a man who's found painting successful. A man whom I twice saved from jail—and who now supports his parents, and earns as many dollars as I do twopenny-bits."

"And who can't paint any more, I am told, than you painter," protested Jacob, pointing to a rope at the bows of one of the smacks on the strand.

"He can paint as well as Pareys," replied Lis, and then, too bitter for more words, he went away. Old Jacob worked on, grinding his teeth and muttering and stamping an occasional foot, till the time came to prepare his presents and his lottery and his scramble for his guests. "Very good," he said, standing away from his easel. He had never painted better; he had never, in his innocent soul, hated worse.

Lis, on returning home, found a letter from the wife of the Privy Councillor. Mevrouw Stommert complained, that her grandson, aged five and "remarkably intelligent," had not recognised the scarlet cheese. "We intended it," she wrote, "for a surprise, on the Eve of Santa Claus, but I fear the surprise will be greater than we intended. Couldn't you come round and improve the likeness before to-night?" That decided Lis. He wrote: "I am leaving for the country. Paint-in a wart," and he caught the midday train for Zwolle. All the streets, all the stations, all the carriages were full

of collective happiness: parcels, greetings, secrets, "surprises." He had never felt so angrily wretched in his life.

Boldam was dark when he reached it, the old Parsonage cold and deserted. He went straight to Mevrouw Donderbus with his presents. The old lady lay in bed with a sudden influenza. Saskia had departed, for the festival at Amsterdam, in wild hopes of a pardon. Redempta sat, inked, doing

nothing.

"But to-night is Santa Claus!" cried Lis.

"So they say. Oh dear, I am inked again. Faugh!"

"Of course Saskia is gone. Every one keeps Santa Claus with his friends, if they can. It is the greatest event of the year."

"I have no friends," said Redempta.

"Nor have I. It is my birthday! We must keep it together."

"Your birthday? And I have no present for you!"

"But I have for you," he laughed.

He began hastily unpacking some of his parcels in the dingy little sitting-room. He stopped. "No, that is not the way," he said. "I must make 'surprises.' How can I, while you're watching me? You must shut your eyes tight while I work."

Eyes are easily closed, but "surprises" are hard to make. Young people who want to have really good ones begin on the seventh of December for next year. Lis, hunting round the bare little house and in corners of his unpractised intellect, soon abandoned the attempt. He contented himself with hiding his small presents, subdivided—for instance the empty case first, then the brooch—in unlikely corners of the Parsoness's unprotected demesne. That lady faintly called out to inquire what all the noise was about, but nothing prostrates you more than the influenza, and her bell was placed miles away, by the door. The little maid was of course at her home, with *her* "surprises"; before the two realised their behaviour, they were romping and laughing all over the house. Lis felt relieved to see Redempta brighten up, as a sun breaks

through clouds. No wonder she had dived between mother and the Parsoness. He was much embarrassed he didn't know what to do with her: he couldn't leave her here: it wasn't right! Impossible! He must leave her long as the mother lived on.

"I've got it!" screamed Redempta from the cellar. She floated up the steep steps like a bird. With delight she had watched her every movement, and she dug under the sofa and peered over the wardrobe. Hers was the very rhythm of motion and harmony of pose. That at least he! come to her somehow, in the convent; the exquisite simplicity of inevitable grace. She held up a saw turnip into which he had carved the brooch in question. "Oh, it's lovely! It's lovely!" she cried, showing the tiny pearls.

"Hush! The old lady upstairs'll have a fit! Don't listen to her knocking! Say, it's *me*." They laughed like children. She dropped the brooch into his pocket and made him search for it everywhere, pretending she had forgotten.

At last they stopped, breathless: all her treasures lay heaped on the table. Lis prepared to go.

"But you—you have no Santa Claus," she said suddenly.

"I don't want any. Let me say with Mevrouw Donderbus that it's wrong."

"No; you can say nothing with Mevrouw Donderbus. It is as I with Sister Angélique; when she said yes, I felt no. We cannot alter."

"I hope you don't feel like that with me?"

She turned away her eyes. "Ah, how can you? Before you have said *au revoir*, I have said *yes*."

"I must be careful what I ask, then."

"You could never ask too much. I would you wanted something I could give you. But you want nothing, and I have nothing to give."

"I want a lot," he said, going to the door. "I want a good temper and common sense; courage and strength to do more work and to do it right. The heath's picked me up, coming over it again in this soft winter air—the

grey heather smelt good—fresh and healthy—in the dark. One ought always to live here, not cropped at the Hague! "He nodded. "Go to sleep and dream of Santa Claus! Oh, don't drop your gingerbread sweetheart! Is he broken? Never mind. Santa Claus has plenty more."

Redempta gathered up the pieces. "Go and dream too," she said, "of people who love you."

He laughed. "No, I am going to work," he said. "Half the night. I feel the divine what's it called upon me! I'm not going to think, but to work! Good-night!"

"Wait a minute! Talking of your work, have you got that model you wanted last summer? The girl you were going to put among the genesta?"

"No; how should I? She has to be a lovely girl, half-undressed, brown against the yellow! Not easy, but an exquisite thing!"

"It is a beautiful flower—the genesta!"

"How well you remember the name. You are getting quite wise."

"It is you have taught me all the nice things. Much nicer than sums."

"The nice things are the useless ones. Good-night again!"

L

HE slipped into his own house with a latchkey to a side door. He found candles in the dark and lighted them. Lamps there were none: a stove burned all winter in the studio.

From this room he passed, through the only entrance now left, into the walled-up study. The long sides were filled with all his summer work at Boldam. He distributed his candles, and sinking down on the sole piece of furniture, the old sofa, he sat gazing right and left in the flickering light.

All around him, in its ever-changing bewilderment of purples was the heath, the many-tinted, the myriad-twisted heath. Wherever he turned, it looked back at him, with fresh memories of glorious days in the sunshine, happy work and happy laughter, in free air beneath fair sky. What weeks they had been of delightful new creation—at last!—of full intercourse with nature and nature's child! His gorge rose at thought of the city and the sitters—Stommert with his pomp of responsibility, Miss Goudsmeer with her babble of balls. He would stay here and paint the grey heath in winter, the grizzled heath, the bronzed heath, with its wonderful patina, the grim iron heath, with its silvery coruscations; the pale dead blooms in their faint flush of pink and their countless shades of whitey wanness, under the unceasing shift of colour from the clouds. The subject was boundless, dissimilar and immortal as the skies or the sea.

His work answered him. He had not seen it for several weeks, not since the first ecstasy of its production. Looking at it, he saw that it was good.

No one could ever see it but he, and the notary whom he had bidden destroy it, unquestioning, on the day of his death. It was his, then, his alone. No one might ever behold it.

Except Redempta, in whose faithful bosom what little she knew of the strange secret hid safe. He lifted a candle and sought the earliest beginning, and so on from memory to memory. To Redempta he owed it all. It was good.

He went back to the studio where an immense canvas stood waiting. He had left it there in the autumn, afraid to begin. Afraid still, but with sudden power, he began.

He worked on, sketching in the first vague contours as he saw them in his mind. Great sweeps of the pencil, now here, now there. He had collected all the candlesticks he could and set them high. Their yellow flames fell across the vast surface. More firmly fell, under the light, slowly taking full shape, the clear curves from the hand, and the soul, of the master.

He worked on for hours, setting his teeth, as his habit was. In a cupboard, left unlocked, he found fresh candles. The lines of his conception swept swiftly into shape. This thing that he fashioned—

The stove was too hot. He set ajar a French window. With all the candles flickering he worked on.

This thing that he fashioned, if only he could complete it, must be the best work of his life.

The French window creaked open. Redempta slipped inside.

"Redempta! At this hour? How could you?"

"I could not sleep," she said shyly, "because of one question I would ask you. The model—would I not suffice? I am brown."

He stood away from his easel. "See, here would be the broom," he said; "here the heath—see, much broom in the background! Here the maid. Here the man."

"There would be a man also?" she asked, frightened.

"Ah, *there* would be the other difficulty—to find an

Adonis. For it is to be the return of Adonis. You don't know about him!"

"No," said Redempta in her humblest voice.

"Of course not. Adonis spends half his life underground, in a cold black prison. In the spring he leaps out into the warmth and light. If that was true of the south how much more of our northern nature! Here, some day against the dark heath would be Adonis. In the glory of golden sunshine and blossom he greets Aphrodite."

"A woman. Who was she?"

"Venus, the goddess!"

Redempta's cheeks mantled. "One day," she breathed, "one of the girls said the evening star was Venus. I don't know what happened: she was expelled."

"Those days are over," he said, biting his lips with his old sense of wrong to her. "This Venus is the goddess of beauty, of sweetness and softness—of love."

Redempta shook her head. "I could not be a goddess that," she said sadly. "But what I could be you might take."

Lis studied her, for the first time, with the eye of the reproducer. 'Tis a new light altogether. She was not the conventional Venus of so much Italian imagery, fat, fair and very nearly, forty. But the grace of her young figure was inestimable: her face must be made a little older, if possible without lessening its charm.

He began making a sketch of her, almost before he knew whither he was plunging, carried along by his creative emotion, eager to place the figure where he saw it already, against the broom. He overheated the stove: he had closed the window. Unresistingly she draped herself according to the needs of the first hurried scrawl. "Let me do it myself!" she pleaded, her eyes full of tears, her hands faltering. "I can't comprehend. Yes, I comprehend. See, I stand so!"

"So!" he echoed; his own eyes kindled. A fever of artistic enthusiasm throbbed in his veins. He was making, creating, as he had never shaped his conception

before. Already it was forming in his sketch, in the scratches on the canvas, above all, in his brain. Adonis awakening from long death in the darkness! Adonis, his own genius, uprising to new life in the light.

"I must get some fresh candles," he said, with a sob of conquered exhaustion. She sank, trembling, lifting her chemise, on a settee. He stumbled in the passage: his candles fell clattering to the ground.

She cried out to him. There was nothing to fear, he said. The house was deserted. Clasine had asked permission to spend Santa Claus with relations at Zwolle.

"I am frightened," said Redempta. "Everything is so silent. Look! it is three o'clock."

"You are tired. I am brutal. It was brave of you to come."

"I am not tired a bit. I am happy, I am always happy with you: you are so good to me. I should like always to be with you and serve you and make you happy. I would be your servant, your slave. But that cannot be. Presently you will go again, and I shall be wretched. I am glad you can use me for this." He bent over her: his hand gently moved the dark hair about her forehead. She looked up to him, and her face almost asked for the kiss he withheld.

"You are good to me: I love you," she said.

At that moment the door was banged open, and Clasine, wondrously be-shawled, a bedroom candle in her hand, stood transfixed on the threshold.

"Oh, Mynheer, I—I beg your pardon. I thought it was thieves!"

"You are a brave woman!" he answered angrily. And lamely: "*I thought you were out!*"

"So it seems," replied Clasine with quick scorn. "I've had the influenza all day."

Redempta lay back, quivering and crying. The woman's cruel eyes looked her through. A long moment of silence followed, eloquent of unutterable things.

"You will permit me to leave your service, Mynheer

Doris," at last stammered the old housekeeper, in accents heavy with sorrow as with wrath.

He stopped his fierce pacing. "Why?" he angrily demanded.

"I cannot live with one who receives——"

"Stop!" he shouted, and, realising at once the so explanation which to these peasants, such as he, would seem perfectly satisfactory—

"This lady and I are engaged to be married," he said.

"I haven't told any one, but *you* might have noticed. Her mother's condition is keeping it back."

"Engaged?" She stared from one to the other: she actually let her candle drip.

"Certainly. Your intrusion is excusable, but—hard agreeable, *Clasine!*" He waited. "I'm sure I beg your pardon," she said, clumsily. "And I wish *the young lady* joy." That was her Parthian shot.

Doris went back to Redempta. "Well?" he said. "Are you satisfied it should be so? Or shall I try to buy this woman's silence—not that I think it would be possible—to-morrow?"

"You are good to me beyond words," she said. "I am happy to be your servant. I love you as a slave loves her saviour, as a dog loves his lord."

Then he took her in his arms, all a-tremble, and he kissed her. "My present!" he said. Till daylight, in swift hours of frenzy, he drew his Venus, a marvel of bold and soft outline, straight upon the canvas from the half-finished sketch.

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NEXT morning Lis met Saskia, with his trap, at Hoogst station and drove her, in the mild December bleakness, across the Boldam heath. The cart was one of those quaint conveyances, half orange oiled wood and half black oil-cloth, so common, and so serviceable, in Dutch country life. As they drove along he told her :

"I am going to marry Redempta." He had come on purpose. He couldn't have Redempta tell.

"Yes," answered Saskia.

"Why do you say that?" He nervously flicked the horse. He oughtn't to have done that.

"I mean, it is what I had expected. Had seen coming on."

"You saw more than I then."

"Women—the other women—mostly do. I will give Redempta credit for being as much surprised as you."

"She is, she is."

"Quite so," replied Saskia wearily. "Only, when we are surprised to find ourselves engaged, we are often much more surprised, too late, to find ourselves married."

"You are unkind, Saskia." He was too generous to say more.

"Naturally you think so. I admit that I should have liked to see you marry some one else. Some one really worthy of you." She gazed across the grey and dripping heath. "Good heavens, Lis, you don't think I'm such a fool as to mean myself?"

"Whom do you mean?"

"No one. An ideal. I suppose you have heard that Pareys is dead?"

"On the contrary, he is better."

"He is dead. He had some great quack celebrity, who killed him. Anyhow, he couldn't have lived long."

Lis drove on in silence. "You are sure?" he said at last.

"Quite sure. For I have a letter—a broken-hearted letter from Boonbakker. At least, the man has a faithful heart."

"You correspond with him still? He has forgiven you?" exclaimed Lis.

"He writes now. He asks me to marry him. I have refused."

Lis drove on. "You seem to think all marriages absurd but your own?" she remarked with acerbity.

"By no means," he answered lamely. "But I pity the wife of Job Boonbakker."

"Not, if he loves her. I have confessed to you, that I—once loved you, Lis. It is a very rare avowal from any woman, unasked. The best thing she can do after it is to marry some one else."

To this he, being no coxcomb, could but reply by sympathetic silence.

"But one piece of advice I might still give you, though advice has often parted the best of friends. Educate your *fiancée*. You are charmed with her ignorance. But you won't appreciate that quality in your wife."

"I must take her as I find her. She is exquisite."

"Yes, her naïveté is adorable. A stupid woman of thirty will be a fearful bore."

"Saskia!"

"Send her for six months to a finishing school. I know there's nothing begun, but they'll manage that. Teach her enough history and geography, to get along with in society—oh, 'tis little enough, no dates of course, or height of mountains, or superfluities such as they wasted our youth in."

"You forget that I was a grocer's boy."

She recovered herself with a shock. "You have taught

yourself. She won't. You mustn't blush for your wife: no man can stand it. They can tell her, for instance, that Shakespeare was an English poet and Molière a French one. She needn't know what they wrote."

He didn't flick the horse again, for he was too good-natured to horses, but he said irritably that he couldn't spare the girl.

"Well, don't let my good advice separate us," answered Saskia, contentedly, and she went on to tell about her father, and that her mother consented to forgive her if she married Job Boonbakker, and that there was a slump in Greenaways. "Queer—a mother's idea of respectability, eh?" she said gloomily. "The Ogre of Aldervank!"

No indeed: Lis Doris could not relinquish his new-found felicity: he had had too little hitherto, as he said, of that sort of joy. Day after day he painted, with the tatting and tattling child by his side. The news of his engagement was all over the place in less time than Clasine, who wanted to tell everybody herself, could have thought possible. The Baroness Bigi, who sat painting amongst her five painting daughters, said: "These artists!" and all the five daughters said: "Oh, mamma!"

The aged Parsoness sat up in bed and declared: "The world appears to me to be growing wickeder and wickeder with every revolution of the sun! But there; I'm an old woman, and I *may* be mistaken." The Parsoness maintains that the sun moves round the earth, because of Joshua.

And the drunken creature at the grocery-store, too dilapidated from her last accident to get up again, turned heavily in her bed. "Well, I suppose I can depart in peace," she said, "but till then Redempta must come all the same and pray regular."

So Lis kept Redempta at Boldam, and stayed there himself, ignoring commissions. He madly threw over a couple of portraits promised for Christmas. Loud grumblings reached him from the capital. The Countess F., the well-known beauty, wrote, curtly, to cancel a vague engagement

for the new year. He had wanted that portrait: he was annoyed. Herrig sent him a letter of remonstrance. He flung it into the fire.

On wet days he worked with all his might at his Return of Adonis, but the picture made slow progress, beyond the wondrous female figure, waiting for the yellow glories of the broom. Oftener he was out on the heath, in the mild damp of a Dutch December, painting its grey and its grizzle and its grit: the broad masses of dull, dark iron, beneath the leaden sky.

"There's a cold east wind to-day," he said to her. "You'd better go back."

"I am not cold here," she replied. "It is cold in the house."

"How's that? Doesn't the Parsoness make fires?"

"The Parsoness is as the North Pole; she feels nothing. And I as the South Pole; I love heat. But with you I am not cold." She drew her little mantle around her.

"If only we had an Adonis!" he said, facing the great open plain.

She waited, watching him begin his sketch. "Why not be yourself the Adonis?" she said shyly.

He laughed. "An elderly Adonis!" he growled. "Ah, little one, I could be Venus's father!"

She pouted. "Saskia says you are the handsomest man in Holland."

"Saskia has never seen Jacob Raff."

"Who is Jacob Raff?"

"A little old man with a long white beard."

Again Redempta pouted. "I prefer young men," she said. "Except you."

Lis began to whistle softly.

"Are you vexed?" she asked.

"No: why should I be?"

"Because I have noticed that, when you are vexed and don't want to say anything unkind, you whistle."

"I shall be careful not to whistle, so as not to show I'm vexed."

She cried out: "Oh, I couldn't. I must laugh and weep as I want to. See, I am so glad to be myself! At school we were just chairs against the wall."

"It is too cold here," he said. "Far better go home."

Her eyes filled. "Are you tired of me? Oh, I know you will grow tired of me. I am not clever enough. Saskia says I must learn geography. Oh, see the cloud up there! It's face is exactly like Sister Angélique! See, the side turned to us! Oh, I forgot—you never knew Sister Angélique."

"The face is very like a face," he said.

She laughed blithely. "But it is so strange you should not have known the convent," she said. "It is all I have known till now. But see, then, the little clouds yonder, right away there in the break among the black, are they not just like little cherubs—the little feathery white flakes in their masses, are they not just like the cherubs with their message—ah, I love, now 'tis near Christmastide, to see the cherubs in the air, coming down, as they did at school—Noel! Noel!" She tossed a welcome to the heavens, clapping her hands.

"Close your jacket!"

"But are they not just like angels? True, I have only seen painted ones, and Soeur"—a bright laugh—"Angélique! Célestine had seen her mother as an angel in tarletan and spangles. She said it was divine!"

"The angels are gone; it is coming on to snow. Hurry up," said Lis.

That evening Redempta complained of a pain in her side. Two days later the doctor said pneumonia.

She was very ill: Saskia nursed her incomparably: Lis struck his breast and prophesied her death.

The new year came while she lay in danger. "The new year? My last year. Why don't she come?" said old Mary Lariks to Lis.

"I have told you before : she is very ill."

"Ill? Who's ill? I'm ill. I want her to come and pray."

Lis looked hopelessly round the dirty little room at the fading light.

"Shall I get you a lamp?"

"No. I'd better get accustomed to the dark, eh? Will it be dark where I'm going, do you think?"

"Don't talk like that. Would you like to see the minister?" Lis bent nearer: he came often now: that was part of his punishment.

"Minister? No, what's the use? You must do it yourself, he says. The Romans do it for you: I want a Roman. Redempta can pray for me when I'm gone."

She lay breathing heavily. She could hardly move. Drink was absolutely forbidden her: it was extraordinary how she terrified the neighbour's child into getting her some. "Ain't I right?" she said. "She's a Roman. Make her come."

"She cannot stir. She is in greater danger than you."

The horrible creature laughed. "You say that because you're in love with her. All you men are alike. You want to have us, and when you've had us—pah!"

"Hold your tongue," he said roughly. "Shall I get you a drink?"

"What drink would you get me? Water? Pah! Hold my tongue?—not I; and that to your mother-in-law! Don't I know? Didn't he promise to marry me?"—again she laughed hoarsely—"he promised them all."

Lis looked at his watch, awaiting the little maid.

"But he promised me first. You know who it was—eh?"

"No, and I don't want to," answered Lis violently. "I'll stop your money, if you speak."

"La, stop my money? I don't want your money. I'm going, I am. I'm dying drunk. I'd rather die drunk than sober. Tell Redempta to go on praying, mind. She's a Roman. I wasn't. Nor was Job Boonbakker."

Lis leaped to his feet. "You lie!" he cried. The wretched little room rang in the dark with his cry.

She held up her hot head. "What, lie?" she screamed. "Ask his mother, the canting old quean, that sails to church every week with her gold Bible! Job Boonbakker's as reformed a Protestant as I am. But his daughter's a Roman! Tell her to come and pray."

"Look here," gasped Lis. "You've said this to me about Redempta being Boonbakker's child! True or not, if I hear that you've repeated it to a single being, I turn you out into the streets to-night, so help me God! Do you hear that, drunk or sober? I send you to the workhouse—do you understand that? Did you hear me swear? You can die there."

Without giving her time for a word of reply, he went out into the street and called to the neighbour's girl. She came running, under protest. "It wants five minutes to the time."

"Never mind: I'll give you an extra penny. She won't live much longer. She don't know what she's saying. Keep her sober, if you can."

But the neighbour's girl found it much easier to keep her drunk. The girl was weary of her charge. And glad when a few days later, shrieking for Redempta, the woman died.

LIS didn't care whether the woman died or lived. The horrible secret had come home to him now, for ever. He had never believed it probable, in spite of all presumption, shrinking from inquiry, confident in the valet's solemn oath. For Lis, like so many who have never been in contact with the law courts, clung to the fallacy that the mass of the common people lie until they swear. It was this conviction which had called for his solemn confirmation to Mary Lariks, imagining that she would only, and indubiously, think him in earnest if she heard the word "God." Now that Mary was gone, the fact remained facing him, that he was marrying the daughter of Job Boonbakker. In his horror he felt all the more drawn to her, for her pitiful birth.

He would marry her, if she lived. Well, she decided to live. She came back into this world out of an imaginary existence full of angels and circus-dancers. Her first word was "ballet": her second was "Lis." She had learnt, very hesitatingly, to call her Saint George by his "little name." Saskia's doing so turned the scale.

The next thing the doctor remarked was that she must fly the Dutch spring. Lis, hovering round the bed, and the bedroom door, considerate, tender, in-the-way, cried out. He could not accompany her: with all expenses heavy upon him, he must tardily hasten back to remunerative work. Ever generously improvident, still as unable to say "no" to a friend as in his struggling student days, he found in his strong-box no funds to fall back upon. He was surprised to see how poor he was. He laughed, till "the

south " jumped up before him like a jack in the box. Then he nearly cried.

There was no help for it. No one d .ms now-a-days of resisting the doctor's behest. The pauper would start for Cairo: only the doctor doesn't tell him to. Unless there's a charitable Something near, that'll pay.

Lis Doris had paid, that many a poor creature might be cut or sent, up or off: with a sad heart and a bright smile he packed Redempta and Saskia into the through train from Amsterdam to Cannes. Redempta was excited as a child starting for a treat. "You'll come and see me," she repeated in the wagon-lits. "You'll soon come and see me!"—her eyes danced with the dream of sunlight and orange-groves.

Lis went back to the Hague and pacified his obstreperous public. He humbled himself in most unpalatable dust before the captious Countess F. That lady did not understand, why the love-affairs of untitled people should interfere with the pleasures of titled ones. Illness and death she fortunately did consider common to all. "Well, yes, of course," she said at last, "if your—what was it—*fiancée*?—died!" Lis apologetically explained that she had recovered. "Let him do you," prompted *sotto voce*, in English, the Countess's latest *cicisbeo*. "He really does 'em better than any one else." Lis listened, conveniently deaf.

So he painted half a dozen great ladies, handsome and well-dressed; he enjoyed doing it. And he answered a call to Frankfurt, where some very rich people made him welcome, as kindly Germans will. There he painted that fine thing of two children with a dog, which has recently been presented to the Gallery. Also he met the thin artist, who told him he was looking fagged. "On the contrary, I never felt better: I'm going south in a week or two," said Lis. "Did you help to bury your great . . . nan, Pareys?" demanded the other, abruptly. " . . . at my ten guilders for the wreath with the rest," replied Lis.

"Your work often reminds me of his," said the German.
"You were his pupil, were you not? What a shame that he did so little! Lucky, lazy dog!"

Lis had sent his ten guilders towards the wreath which a number of Dutch artists placed on the Paris grave of their illustrious compatriot. His letter of condolence which must also make mention of his engagement, proved a far more arduous missive to post. But he climbed up to the confession as he had climbed down to the tribute. His letter brought an early response from the widow, full of kindly interest in this curious betrothal, with a widow who had not even the glamour of good looks. For Lis had not exposed the Baroness's trick. Time will tell, he said.

"I am so glad to know you happy," wrote Yetta. "To feel that really you are quite happy at last. My son is a great comfort to me. He is always affectionate and kind. But now I hope he will take life more seriously than hitherto, will do something. It has been a great trial to me, though my husband did not feel it, that Alex seemed to fritter away his youth in idle play. But now he has been greatly impressed by the tributes to his father's life-work, all the praise in the newspapers and letters, all the speeches at the grave. It was an imposing French ceremony, with the soldiers, and the music, and the representatives of the Government and the Academies. I liked your Dutch wreath best. Alex feels his responsibility as son of so distinguished a father. We have much to do here just at present, but we hope to come to Aldervank early in the summer. Odo hated the place: Alex is anxious to see it. And I am looking forward to meeting your betrothed and to showing you my son.

"P.S. Who knows how you may influence him for good!"

"His life-work!" mused Lis. He thought how facile some people's life-work was.

He often reflected on Yetta's letter, whilst limning his

Hague smart ladies and his amiable Frankfurt "Protzentum." The letter disquieted him, not because of the blare of trumpets over the dead man, but because of his novel interest in the son. He told himself that he was a bad reader of letters. Why did Redempta's frequent, ill-written scraps disturb him? There were but two moods in them: exuberant delight at what she saw and extravagant despair at his absence. It was his fault, if he wanted herself.

When, however, the despair grew predominant, he snatched at his well-earned holiday. He felt relieved that the direct route to the Riviera no longer passes by Paris. Nothing came between his long longing and the swift embrace in the stopped train at Cannes.

Impossible to deny the fact that the girl was looking worried. "I cannot help it: I have done my best," said Saskia Lokster, in the little sitting-room of the "Pension des Mimosas." She turned again to her Greenaways under palm trees, Merry Christmas Greenaways (for next season) amongst Orange Groves. "You do them better and better," said Lis, glancing down, at the drawings. "How badly," she answered, bending lower, "I must have done them years and years ago, when they paid best!"

Redempta, in a sunshiny walk along the Croizette and a hasty aside into the Jardin des Hespérides, was quite ready to furnish elucidation, in a deluge of tears.

"I shall never be clever enough," she cried. "It's no use my trying. I can't."

At first he did not comprehend. "Why should you be clever? What's the good? I'm not."

"Oh, yes, you are. Saskia says so. Immensely. I didn't think women had to be clever. Even at the horrid Convent we hadn't to be. Only to learn pretty work and about the saints!"

He bit his lips. "Quite enough too," he said, vexed. "What does Saskia say?"

"That a wife ought to be a companion, but a companion

isn't a bit the same as a wife. There's a cross old French woman at the Pension has a——" She began to weep much louder. "Oh, I never could be that," she cried.

"Hush! Hush!" he exclaimed, with a man's dismay at a scene. He drew her away with him amongst sheltering bushes. "I don't want a horrid companion: I want a dear little wife."

"Do you truly?"—she wiped her eyes—"because I can't remember things that mean nothing. I try till my head aches. I don't care about Jacques-Pierre: you know all that he wrote: that is different. I forget now, was he English or Dutch?"

"English," answered Lis solemnly. "He really was Bacon, and bacon is English. Do you get him for breakfast?"

"For breakfast and dinner. Only this morning she says to me: 'Remember about Jacques-Pierre and Canaille.'"

"Corneille?"

"He too is a great poet: I do not understand about the bacon." She began to cry again.

"Never mind," he said, ashamed. "Forget all about them. Smell the delicious blossoms all around."

She lifted her pretty head. "I forget, because I do not know. But, then, teach me their songs, I say. Those I could remember.

"Au jardin de mon père!"

"It is lovely, but, my dear child, you mustn't sing here!"

"True: you see I always do the wrong thing, do I not?"

"No, sweetest, when you do it, it is right."

She shook her head: "You stop me."

"I shan't stop you. You are quite correct. A woman's only duty is to do with charm what she chooses to do."

She looked at him. "I never said that. Are you laughing? But Célestine always said that only the women who didn't marry need be clever."

She added quickly : " That is why I am in a hurry to be married."

" You would have had chances enough," he replied, with a tinge of umbrage.

She felt the shadow. " When one has my good fortune, one trembles," she said. " Célestine has told me wrong, I think, of many things. The world outside the Convent is different from what she remembered. It has changed, or her funny set of artists isn't yours!" She laughed, knowing better now. He risked the thing, caught her in his arms, so pretty under the orange-trees, and kissed her. Some English people were just round the corner, but they wouldn't notice, for they were discussing golf.

She pressed against him. " Célestine always said that in the Convent one must be good and unhappy, in the world one must be happy and good. I, I would be happy and good, with you, Lis. Let me be that : I can be nothing more."

It was useless to scold Saskia for endeavouring to do a kindness. She had a single, and sensible, answer. " You will find an ignorant wife of thirty a nuisance. And a bore."

LIII

THE month of May found the two birds of passage returned, for the Riviera physician had, more excusably, agreed with the Dutch one, that May—hence its name—might mean summer in Holland. It found the Parsoness established, a bit stiff, in her wicker arm-chair, all the better, in body and temper, for her winter ailments and failings. It found old Lokster and his wife—found him talking, her approving—in Boldam apartments as early “Summer-flies.” Professor Peter Paul Lokster had sent over three hundred dollars “to go and enjoy yourselves.” “I should like to see the heath that Lis wouldn’t paint,” said old Paul.

The Parsoness wrote to her son, Ryk, the well-to-do ranch-owner, and bade him send her three hundred dollars for her poor. He replied that he would pay the passage out of a couple, if they were young and able-bodied, or young and good-looking. The Parsoness sighed. “My dear husband was not much of an educator,” she said.

But she welcomed, with great interest, her widowed daughter and that daughter’s practically unknown son. The dread visit to Babylon lay far back in the Parsoness’s memory. And now the young lord was come to Aldervank: the whole house had been painted and cleaned to receive him! “I feel like Naomi!” quavered the Parsoness, lifting feeble hands. Her study of the Old Testament had never equalled her talk about the New.

“Where is Lis?” asked Yetta, golden-haired, in her impressive French mourning. The long veil sank to the ground over broad bands of crape.

"I'm sure I don't know. Gadding about as usual. Saskia, where is Lis Doris?"

"At Munich, as Government Commissioner for the Exhibition. It was inevitable, Mevrouw Pareys. He will be back in ten days."

"Ten days is a long time: I am sorry," said Yetta, slowly. "And where is his engaged? I must see her before then."

"She goes to the Parsonage since he left us, last Tuesday. She goes and sits there, and mopes, I think. She is sorry he went."

"The Parsonage?—ah!" said Yetta Pareys.

"Nonsense: of course lovers have to go away now and then," interposed the Parsoness sharply. She added in gentler accents: "At least it was so in my time. I had a dear friend engaged to a ship's officer: the day after their engagement he went off for three years to the East."

"Poor thing!" said Yetta.

"Nonsense: she married somebody else long before he came back."

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Yetta, with a happy reminiscence of childhood. "And when he came back, she was a widow——"

"But *he* had a black wife."

"I hope all that will not happen in this case," remarked Saskia.

Yetta rose. "Yes, she is stately," thought Saskia, who had been thinking it, hard, all the time. "She is handsome. She is a splendid woman still."

"I shall walk back," said Yetta, "as far as the Parsonage. The carriage can come for me there."

"Shall I come with you?" hesitatingly volunteered Saskia.

"I would rather go alone: do you mind?" No, Saskia did not mind. She hated this fine lady all the worse for not being able to dislike her.

So Yetta walked alone amidst the memories of her

youth. The spring warmth played lightly around her proving that for once the little Boldam doctor had correctly pinned his faith on the fickle return of the stork. The season was early, jostling the calendar. Along the quiet road, unchanged in half a life-time, the fresh grasses fluttered under the fluttering fresh leaves. From the distance, behind the fields and few houses, came the breath of the dark heath-land, stirring in its sleep.

"My mother!" said Yetta, half-aloud, as she walked. There was kindness in the tone, little else. The Parsoness had eagerly asked her daughter, if she was pleased with the Dominé's tomb-stone, for which Yetta had paid. "It is solid," the Parsoness had remarked. "I don't think it was dear."

To Yetta Boldam lay deserted, now that at last she was returned to it. Her life seemed a strange one to her: as our lives seem to each of us, unless, worse, we consider them dull. Such reflection had risen to the top in the early days of her widowhood. It was inevitable, in a generous nature as hers, that she should deem she had wronged her dead husband by accepting him. Even though she had laid all her cards on the table. Afterwards she had done her duty, enduring with a certain abashed pity his torrent of them both. The first years had been the worst. When fame came, and the gay life in Paris, and the child's voice through the house, she had found large compensation for an indefinite thirst. She stood removed by the whole breadth of her nature from the women who are uncomprehended, or who don't comprehend, and complain. Lis Doris had seemed to her a boy, when she, already a woman, married. Her own husband had first taught her that this lad was become a man, who could love. She remembered, indelibly, the moment, the spot in the woods, where the thought had come to her heart: "It were possible!" She had put it away, not believing. She was doubly glad, now, as she walked along the Boldam high-road, a widow, that her course led her to Lis Doris's betrothed.

"You—you love only with the intellect, not with the sense," her husband had often angrily told her. Once only she had answered him. "I think not," she had said gently. "I think I can love with the heart."

Why else did she pass the Old Parsonage, with lingering, longing glances, and wend thoughtful footsteps to the shuttered tenement a few yards beyond? The place belonged to her: Lis had paid the woman's rent. She stood gazing at its dreary desertedness. With a shudder she shook off the long past, for the moment, turning briskly away.

At the sound of approaching footsteps Redempta looked out from the studio glass door. She flung it open, in ecstasy:

"Madame Pareys!"

Yetta drew back, astonished.

"Are you?—yes, of course, you are—Redempta!"

The girl began to dance delightedly across the polished floor.

"You thought I was ugly, as did Mynheer Doris! Ohé! la bonne farce! You thought I was ugly: did you not? Now confess?"

"I had heard," replied Yetta, perplexed, "that you were very much changed."

"But I am not changed: now, tell me:"—she went on dancing. "Yes, I am changed. I am improved?"

"You were a little girl: you have kept your old face, on the whole."

"And I am pretty, eh?" Redempta stopped, sweeping her curtsy. "Say I am pretty: it is a pleasant thing to hear."

"And to say," replied Yetta with a slight effort. "Yes, you are very pretty. As the wife of Lis Doris ought to be."

"He loves me," said Redempta proudly, making room for her visitor. "And I love him."

"That is as it should be." Yetta sat down, disturbed by the changes around her, distracted by the sudden beauty of this girl.

"You are different," continued Redempta, watching her. "You are handsome as a statue. Lis thinks so."

The "little name" hurt. "Does he say that?" a moment ago she had rejoiced in her "foster-son's" happiness and now, because this child was so fair and a bit foolish—

"For shame!" she said to herself. And to Redempta: "You are to be married, I hear, in June."

The girl, who had resumed dancing, perhaps conscious of her grace, broke off. "On the thirty-first of June," she said gravely. "On the very last day of the month."

Yetta did not correct her: she understood that at the Convent school the days had been marked not by numbers but by saints.

"It will be a beautiful wedding," said Redempta. "I shall have quantities of beautiful clothes." She examined the arrival from Paris. "You will come?" she said. "In a grey dress, will you not?"

"I don't know. It is barely seven months since my husband died."

"Oh, you must come. Lis hopes you will. Did you love your husband so very much?"

"He has not taught you to doubt that?" replied Yetta.

"Now you are angry with me! No, he has taught me to admire you. And to be a little afraid, because you are so much grander, and older than I."

"He too is older," said Yetta restlessly. She rose and approached the draped easel. "Are you afraid of him too?"

Redempta placed herself, with outspread arms, in the way. "Nobody may touch it!" she cried. "I promised. Yes, I am a little afraid of him too."

"Surely I am an exception!" There was a sharp ring in Yetta's voice. The two faced one another.

"Nobody may look at it but I!"

Yetta halted uncertain. Then, recovering herself: "We must write and ask him," she answered coldly: she turned to inspect the first object within reach.

"Everything else," said Redempta graciously, "you may look at. I don't think he likes us to touch."

"I cannot imagine his caring," replied Yetta laying down a little Russian bronze that no one could have broken. "I know him so much longer than you. It sounds more like Clasine." She continued her inspection. "But this door?" She paused abruptly. "This door must lead into the old study! I presume I may go in there."

Redempta knowingly shook her head. "No one may go in there. Not even I. He's got the key with him, in Munich. He—he wears it under his clothes!"

Yetta stood reflecting. "But the furniture is gone!" she said, more to herself.

Redempta nodded, omniscient. The older woman conquered herself. "Do you know the secret?" she said laughing. "It cannot be much of a secret. There are two windows at the back."

"I know the secret. Part of it. It's the biggest secret of his life. I can't tell why it should be. The windows are walled up."

Yetta's colour went white and pink. "We will talk of something else," she said. "I should like to have seen my father's room again. Do you like Boldam?"

The young girl came closer. "Every one is good to me here," she said. "It is delicious. You were good to me, do you remember?—at the School. I love you for it. Will you love me here?"

Yetta kissed her. "Yes: I will love you."

"For my own sake? Not only for Lis's?"

"For my sake: don't you think that's the safest reason? Come: I must go to Clasine. I shall ask her to show me over the house." She paused in the doorway. "Or is that also forbidden ground?"

"No," said Redempta gravely. She added, her intention purely courteous: "You may look at these old peasants. Don't you think them well done?"

Yetta had no eyes for the peasants. Redempta came

after her up the tortuous stair. "Clasine, I want to see my old bedroom," said Yetta. The grey housekeeper had never taken much interest in the female members of the family; moreover she considered all the improvements which time had made in Miss Yetta a mistake.

"He's taken it for his bedroom," she answered, scornfully flinging open the door. "He leaves the best rooms for his friends."

It *was* a poor little chamber. The superb lady from Paris filled it, sweeping her sables aside, as she took in its limits at a glance. She beheld on all sides strange faces, alien souvenirs, a whole life of interests and intimacies, unshared. Only the poor faded daguerreo-type of the mother he had never known, in a place of honour. Ah! and yonder a small portrait of herself, in a well-lighted corner—an absurd child one. Was that all? All. Once more she glanced round. Strange faces. Signatures. A cheerfully companionable artist-existence. Two fine water-colours, by himself, of Redempta. She stood, a stranger, in the crowded assemblage. "Let us go down to the living-rooms," she said.

"There I shall not feel it," she told herself. Yet there also her eyes danced restlessly over all the novel surroundings, the changes—not that these hurt her: the house was as new. "What are you looking for?" asked Redempta, the instant they were alone.

"Nothing," replied Yetta evasively. "Is there no portrait of Lis?"

"Only mine," said his betrothed, and opened her locket.

It was a large one, for Redempta's taste in ornament was large. Yetta took it on her hand at the girl's neck, turning, in that silent drawing-room, to the light. For a long time the two women stood thus enchained: their faces almost touched.

Yetta let the trinket fall and gazed away at the green trees. She did not speak.

"Say something!" begged Redempta in a nervous voice.

"Why, what should I say? What is the matter?"

Redempta sank down on a low seat. "You love him," she said, trembling now from head to foot.

An angry cloud swept over Yetta's fair brow: she looked round with laughter in her face and her tones.

"You silly, wicked, jealous child!" she said, and knelt down, affectionately entwining her arms round the frightened young figure.

But Redempta struggled to release herself. "I have thought sometimes—" she cried—"but, no, it was impossible! He—he remembers you, but not as you are. And you—I know not what you have said or thought, but you love him now!" She began to cry, naturally, unwillingly, dabbing her eyes.

"You are wrong: you are really wicked," persisted Yetta, on the floor, sustained by her sense of patience; and again she tried to fondle the recusant. "You are a woman: you must feel how insulting is this thing that you say."

The girl leapt to her feet, her eyes flashing. "The insult," she cried, "is to me!" Yetta sank, disabled, against the chair. "Do you think I have no sight? We talk much—oh, too much!—but we *see*. I have seen: I have seen that you love him. In your face. In your look. In your silence." She brushed her hands across her dried eyes. "In your silence most of all."

Yetta rose also: she regained her outer calm. When she spoke, she had even regained her voice. "I have told you that yours is a foolish fancy," she said, fastening the girl's gaze to her own. "If you choose to say this thing to hurt me—I cannot stop you."

"To hurt myself," said Redempta. Yetta opened her arms, and the look at the young face was as gentle as any look could have been at the portrait underneath.

But Redempta held back. "I am stupid: I know nothing," said Redempta. "Perhaps I am wrong."

"You are wrong, and you are right. I have loved Lis Doris all my life."

" Ah ! "

" Not as you understand. I have not come to steal him away from you. Nor has he the faintest desire"—his accent grew very solemn and very sad—" the feeblest desire to be so stolen."

Redempta stood shaking her head. " I know only about love that it is love," she said. " I do not know much about it, I admit. You love him. I am jealous. It is true."

Yetta changed her manner. " Keep, then, at least, these silly thoughts to thyself. In six weeks thou wilt marry him. That is enough"—she walked to the door.

Redempta's look expressed a sudden, overwhelming terror. " You will be near us ! You will be between us ! " she cried. But Yetta had dragged forward her long veil as she hastened to the waiting carriage. Behind the crape in the dark brougham, she wept tears of far more wretchedness than wrath.

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LIV

"**H**AVE you seen the wonder?" asked Alex at dinner, eating as fast, and as much, as he could.

"What wonder?" Yetta clicked a bracelet.

"The house at Boldam of Doris the painter, the man whom my father so much disliked. To hear the people about here it's an eighth wonder."

"Why, Alex, it was my old home! I have told you that."

"Have you? I'd forgotten. I suppose it's much altered?"

"It is altered." She played with her fork. "Alex, did he *tell* you he disliked Mr. Doris?"

"As a matter of fact, he said it was Doris disliked and injured him. My father was too good-natured to dislike people."

"Yes, your father was good-natured," said Yetta bravely.

"At least, he was always very good to you."

"Us, mother."

"Us, of course. I wasn't thinking of myself. You must have misunderstood, Alex. Mr. Doris never injured your father in any way."

"The French say that Doris's technique is a poor imitation of my father's!"

"He was his pupil. They hadn't met for years. Doris paints portraits. I saw his engaged to-day." The single servant had re-entered; the last words were an escape.

"What is *she* like?" asked the young man, eyeing the next dish.

"She is exquisite," Yetta generously replied.

"Whew!" pronounced the child of Paris, and Pareys. He devoted himself to his asparagus, complaining that he preferred the little French kind. And then he talked of much there was still to arrange "at home" (that is: the hotel near the Parc Monceau)—the gift of "Heat on the Heath" to the Luxembourg.

After dinner he called to his black poodle, and strolled out into the moonlight. The chief advantage he had as yet derived from his father's demise had been the purchase of a dog. For Pareys, in his queer attachments, had refused years ago, to replace the defunct Chows. So now Alex had bought a poodle, black, for mourning.

"A good white one is more expensive," he said to Job.

"You'll have more money than you'll know what to do with, anyway," replied Boonbakker.

"H'm!" said Alex, but he did not grudge this man his big legacy.

Job Boonbakker had bought the old farm-house, the Holst, and was turning it into a "Grange." He had informed his smug mother that she must go into a cottage. He had been very gentle, and his mother had been very loud.

"You can't stay here, with my goings-on!" he had said.

"Why not? I don't mind young doings. And you're a young man still, compared with me!"

"Well, you can't, for I'm going to marry."

"Marry!—la!—you!—Job!—Who?" Job smiled to her, more sweetly than ever.

"A young lady. You don't know her. But her name's Saskia Lokster."

"I know her. The fat red-haired old woman! I've seen her at Boldam church. She might be Mother to one of the fat angels."

"I'm glad she goes to Church," answered Job, imperturbably. "Yes, I'm going to marry that fat red-haired old woman. Though she doesn't know yet."

"La!—she won't have you!"

"Perhaps not, but I'm going to marry her all the same."

"Why ever, you stupid?"

"Because," replied Job, softly rubbing his hands, "when I've married her, I shall be able to beat her. As I never shall be able to beat you." He slipped away. His mother, after some hesitation, decided to laugh loud enough for him to hear.

During these days Job was always to be found pottering about his new premises. It was not the expenditure, and the customary dishonesty, which troubled him, but the uncertain, and ill-considered work. His own combinations were much better. "If the man had but made each step one inch higher!" he explained to Alex, when that young gentleman found him in the moonlight.

"Quite so. I say, Job, do you know the girl who's going to marry this Doris?"

"Which Doris?" answered Job.

"The painter, who lives at Boldam. The man who painted that bad pastel of me."

"Oh, yes, that painter who lives at Boldam."

"Well, how about the girl?"

"I never heard of any girl," answered Job.

"My mother says that she's 'exquisite.' That's a strong word, Job."

"If the moon would come out again, I could show you," said Job. "The builder is such a fool that he doesn't calculate——"

"I don't care a hang about those stairs of yours to-night, Job. The moon don't come out to see your ruin! She's coming to listen to me!"

"Well, I'll listen too," said Job. "What is it? Oh, the girl, I remember. It's the girl who lives with your grandmother. I heard that Lis Doris was going to marry her."

"My grandmother!" repeated Alex. "Whew!" It was a very different "Whew!" to the one he had uttered at dinner. "You've seen her? I mean, the girl?"

"Never in my life," said Job Boonbakker. Alex whistled to the dog and lighted another cigarette.

"The evenings here are dull beyond belief," he said. "I shall run across and call on my grandmother."

"You will always have the run," answered Job serenely. "I believe you spend half the day in your car."

"It is the one amusement that never palls. I could drive round and round to all eternity, if only the circle were a reasonable size."

"Reasonable is the word," replied Job. "Now, here is the moon again. Just let me convince you that the builder——"

But Alex had moved away, pretending not to hear. He strolled back and got his open motor: the black poodle sprang up beside him: together they tooled along the moonlit road.

At first, among the Aldervank trees, things went smoothly. The dog, sitting up, whiskered and curled, yapped from pure delight. Presently came the open heath, with the broad silver band across it. So far, so good. But then here was a split in the road—slow down!—and no finger-post. During his few days in the country Alex had preferred the wooded side of Aldervank. Not because of its greater beauty, but for the motorist's reason, better roads.

"Here goes, then!" He dashed down the wrong turning, past a homestead, through some fir trees, and into the sand.

A scream had frightened him. He leaped from the motor.

"What is it?" he cried in terrified French. "Is any one hurt?"

Another scream answered him in the same language.

"Qu'est-ce?" said the scream. "Qu'est-ce? Ah! Ah, que j'ai peur!" The dog burst out barking.

Alex ran back a few hasty steps. His heart was in his mouth, for his car had bumped over something. Never mind screams unless you've bumped!

"Qu'est-ce ?" he also shouted. "Mais ne criez donc pas comme ça !" He hadn't hurt the person who screamed.

He had snatched the small red light from the back of the car. He ran with his lantern. In the moonshine stood a figure, half-way up the bank, against a tangle of bushes, flattened, frightened, out of reach. He halted by the roadside: he lifted the glare of his lamp against the darkness. The figure was a maiden's, white-robed and rosy in the red reflection of the glass. Graceful in her helplessness, she hung against the faintly yellowing broom. Her hat was down somewhere in the middle of the road. The black dog, from his post on the dim motor-car, barked madly.

"French !" exclaimed the young man, in amazement. "But whoever are you ? What's wrong ?"

"Oh, what have you done ? You won't hurt me ?" came the unexpected reply.

"Hurt you ? No, indeed !" He let the lurid halo enclose her. "Are you nymph ?" he said, half-laughing, "or goddess ? Here at night ?"

His tone somewhat reassured her.

"And if I were a goddess," she said. "Pray, who are you ?"

"Your servant, a poor mortal, at your feet."

And now she laughed down to him, suddenly quite happy, safe. She held on to the yellow broom, as she let herself slip earthwards.

"Adonis !" she laughed. She ignored his helping hand.

"Who was it that Adonis made love to ?" he questioned. "I forget."

"You must find out then. He met a lady on the heath. But he didn't frighten her. Where is my hat ? Oh !" She held up the wreck.

"I am very sorry. How came it in the road ?"

"Is it a motor-car ?" was her answer. "I have never seen them but in pictures. I was sitting here, dreaming,

and suddenly you roared down upon me—bellowing—ah ! ”

“ It is noiseless ! ” he cried indignantly.

“ Is it ? ”—she turned to where the thing stood clattering.

“ Then is all that noise your dog ? ”

“ It is uttering its protest against roads that end in sand ! ”

“ They will finish this one some day, and *we* shall be sorry. You cannot think what a lovely spot it is by day ! ”

“ It could not be lovelier than it is now ! ”

They had reached the motor. He went round to the blaze of the lanterns. It struck white against his face.

“ You are French ! ” she exclaimed.

He was busy with his lights. “ Why, what makes you think that ? ”

“ Your French is our French,” she said hastily. “ The first I have heard since I came here. It sounds homelike. And yet that is ungrateful. Also, you are the first young man I have ever spoken to in my life—is that not strange ? ”

“ Very strange—where do you come from ? ”

“ L'Œuvre ! So this is a motor ? Do you wonder I was frightened ? Great eyes in the dark, and a bellow ! I thought it was a monster—*de l'enfer* ! ”

“ Fie, what do you know of ‘ *l'enfer* ’ ? ” He stopped the machine. “ Quiet, Flirt ! ”

She shuddered. “ The Sisters always talked of it. Ah, now, what a silence ! Why do you call him ‘ Flirt ’ ? ”

“ It's a she. I call her Flirt, because she makes friends with everybody.”

“ I am not a flirt,” she said, ingenuously offended. “ Men also can be flirts.”

“ Did the Sisters teach you that ? ”

“ Célestine did—my friend.”

“ Ah, the convent had its compensations ! ”

“ See, you have ruined my hat ! ”

“ I am desolated. But I bumped over something harder than your hat.”

She laughed shrilly. "My bag of bread. I had forgotten it. He always brings it here for the beasts before bed-time, and I promised to do so too."

"What beasts? Who is he?"

"All the beasts. The wild ones. The heath is full of them." She fondled the dog Flirt.

"Good shooting?" demanded Alex.

"I don't know. One never sees them. We do not shoot."

"Stand aside, please! I must drag up this wheel!" He had flung off his fur-coat. Setting his feet with an effort he hauled up the sunk rubber, out of the sand.

She clapped her hands. "That was fine," she said. "I wish I was a man!"

He stood breathing hard, pleased.

"It was only a little bit," he said modestly. "The car stopped in splendid style. Isn't she a beauty?"

"She's queer. She smells horrid. What are you going to do?"

"Work her back to the clearing there. Then I'm all right."

"Bon voyage!—Monsieur Adonis!"

"Do you stay here with the other nymphs?—or may I take you home?" She reflected. "How black the great heath is!" he said, looking out.

"And how dark-blue the sky! Is it not lovely in the moonlight? It seems a pity to go!"

"Shall we stay here together?"

"Oh, no, no!" she exclaimed in a flurry. "Go away! Ah!" she gave a scream—"You have started it again! See, I am too frightened!"

He held out his hand, but it was to draw her towards the step. "Try! It is really good fun," he said. The hand and the voice, firm and gentle, persuaded her into the seat.

Flirt, unyielding, sat up tight beside her: the three must have made a picturesque group, in the moonbeams, as the car grunted backwards and slowly roared round.

Then they glided softly under the fir-trees in a lace-work of light and shadow, and Redempta relaxed her hold of the seat.

"Oh, how fast!" she gasped.

"We are creeping. I wish I could go slower."

"That is kind of you."

"Purely selfish. Shall we turn to the right?"

"To the left. I live at Boldam."

"I was going there, to see my grandmother. My name is Pareys."

"Why, I live with her!" cried Redempta.

"Yes, you are the bride of Lis Doris."

"I am the bride of Lis Doris," she repeated with pride. "Did you know?"

"Yes, as soon as I saw your face."

"Why?" Then, as he waited, she repeated, with childish eagerness: "Why?"

"Because," he replied sagely. But he couldn't resist the temptation. "I had heard," he said. "There would hardly be two beauties at Boldam."

They had reached the high-road. She answered simply: "Nonsense. You knew I was French."

He neither denied nor replied, for he deemed he had been sufficiently civil. He only said: "It's too late for my visit:" and she asked to be set down at the Parsonage gate.

"At the house where my mother lived as a child!"

Redempta stood reflecting on this regrettable fact, as the car dwindled rapidly away into the night. Yetta Pareys was this young fellow's mother. The old Parsonage was full of memories, to Lis and to Yetta, of a time when Adonis and Aphrodite were young in the moonlight—as now.

Adonis, blithely whistling, drew up by the scaffolding of the Holst.

"You still there, Job?"

The loutish figure showed itself against a broad blank of wall.

"Got your staircase right?"

"I have. It's the builder.

"Well, I've seen the—what did my mother call her?"

"'Exquisite,' you told me."

"Just so: I'd forgotten. I've got such a lot of adjectives of my own." Alex rattled off.

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A VERY few days later the Baroness Bigi, much less faded in appearance than her old blue satin or her five unmarried daughters, remarked that this had always been a Christian neighbourhood, and it was a very great pity that other people came to live in it ! She refused to go and console with Mevrouw Pareys on account of the *dead*.

"Look here !" said the puzzled Baron. "Do you think I could possibly stretch a point and send the wretched boy a tract ?" For the Baron Bigi distributed leaflets—and exhortation generally—amongst the lower classes (Job before his legacy) and the lower middle classes (Job after his legacy), but he drew the line at the upper middle class, to which he reckoned Alex Pareys. Above the upper middle class was "We."

"Perhaps I might," dubitated the Baron.

"Oh, no !" cried the five young ladies (fifty to forty).

"I've got such a good one: 'The Swift Road to Ruin !'"

"That might apply to *any* motorist," said the Baroness with cruel acerbity.

"Even to a pious one !" suggested the youngest daughter, not yet soured, sometimes pert.

"There are no pious motorists," replied her mother.

"My dear, your brother Henry is seriously thinking of getting a car."

"Oh, how delightful ! He can take us to a concert !" chorused the daughters.

"I shall give him *my* opinion," said the Baroness. She added with a great air of martyrdom: "Well, then, tell

them to put in the horses ! I will go to this poor mother to-day."

A message came back from the stables that the coachman did not care to drive to-day. It had to be taken in by the latest liveried plough-boy, engaged last week.

"You can't go," announced this gold-laced, pig-faced booby. "The worse horse's four legs is off."

"What !" shouted his master.

The poor creature's red face grew purpler, above his light-blue coat.

"The—the worse horse's four legs is off," he repeated madly.

"Screw them on : screw them on at once," said the youngest daughter. The second inquired which horse was the worse one ?

"I'm sure I don't know," answered their bewildered parent. The Baroness and the very eldest daughter were heard questioning in shrill tones, if, and why, the new footman was insane ?

All the same, they had to wait a week before calling at Aldervank, for the off-horse's fore-legs continued bad. When they went, the motor with its three occupants flew past them, but that it might have done any day.

Every afternoon of that exquisite week, in divinest spring weather, while the six ladies Bigi were clamouring for "the Englishman's Embrocation" (which the coachman disapproved of), every long, lucid May afternoon, in the freshest, fairest, spring weather, the motor with its three occupants flew across the country-side. Yetta Pareys, in her tranquil enshrinement of lilacs and daffodils, surrounded outside by bulbs or indoors by callers, was content that her son should shew kindness to the companions, in these dull days, of grandmamma Donderbus.

"These *are* dull days," she said sympathetically to Redempta when Alex brought the two ladies to Aldervank to tea. "When do you expect Lis ? Next Saturday ? And the wedding in less than a month !"

"Oh, the motoring is glorious!" replied the girl, her eyes beaming.

"Does Miss Lokster think so too?"

Yes, Miss Lokster thought so too. That was a good thing. Mevrouw Pareys had sometimes feared that Miss Lokster accompanied the young people from kindness.

Miss Lokster's ideas of kindness, very different from her hostess's, induced her mostly to leave the motor (whose motion she detested) as soon as it had lost sight of the Parsoness's windows. Miss Lokster took an unreasonable interest in the building at the Holst: when occasion offered, she would propose that direction before descending. But the permanent third occupant was Flirt.

A motor, it must be admitted, is not the best place for what the French call "le Flirt." Yet it has the advantage of absolute privacy. Untouchable. The only Flirt, however, in this motor was the poor, isolated, dog, deprived of all contact with her kind except running over them. The young people said pretty and pleasant things to each other, but neither forgot that one was to be married next month.

It may be asked whether, under such circumstances, beautiful young brides should go motoring with beautiful young beaux. Saskia thought not, unless they liked it.

"I like it immensely!" cried Redempta.

"As long as you like it, and not him," remarked Saskia. Up in the little room, where they'd many a talk, before Redempta's white-curtained window, with the moon cut in half.

"I like him very much too," replied Redempta. "Don't you?"

"Very much. He is extraordinarily handsome. I cannot think where he got such good looks."

"Mevrouw Pareys—" began Redempta in a burst of generosity.

"H'm—middling! The father's portrait is just interesting. Have you noticed how this boy's black lashes curl around his forget-me-not eyes?"

"Yes," answered Redempta softly, blushing in the shade.
"I like those forget-me-not eyes. They haunt one. Yes, one does not forget."

"Hush!" said Redempta. "Do not let us talk silliness."

"Silliness? My dear, you are rude. And I so much older. It is because I come of a painter's family, that I think so much of beauty. Worth is better: you are right."

"You yourself called Lis Doris the finest man in Holland!" exclaimed Redempta indignantly.

"Who spoke of Lis Doris? Yes, certainly, he is handsome. He is getting on for Jupiter. This Alex is—what said you?—Adonis."

"I never said that—not to you!" cried Redempta in tears.

"Did you not? In your sleep, perhaps. Or he told me. What matter? Be glad, child, you are going to marry Jupiter."

"Poor Jupiter!" sobbed Redempta hysterically. "To marry such an ignorant, insignificant nobody as me!"

"Poor Jupiter! Perhaps you are right," answered Saskia, speaking carefully. "When Jupiter stoops to his handmaid, is it worse for the handmaid or for him?"

Redempta was weeping bitterly. "He bought me. He delivered me. He saved me. All that I have—all that I am—so little!—it is his."

"Be then thou his servant," answered Saskia. "He cannot expect a companion. He is generous. Accept his generosity. And forget all forget-me-not eyes."

The girl cried out, as if stabbed. Saskia bent low and kissed her.

"I love Lis," said Saskia, "perhaps even better than you."

LVI

"COME along!" said Alex, early next morning. He stood by his motor-car, bright and self-satisfied as ever. But Redempta drew back. "I can't."

"What? Why not? You don't look ill!"

"Do not ask me. I cannot."

"Fiddlesticks. What do you think I've come for? The weather's glorious. We're going to Zwolle, to see the sights, and lunch."

"To Zwolle! Oh, why didn't you go sooner?"

"You know why. Because we waited. Come along!"

Redempta's eyes sought Saskia's, but Saskia's were studying a puddle.

"Give us your reason!" said Alex, imperiously.

"No, no!" cried Redempta. She recovered herself.

"I haven't got a reason. I don't want to go." He held out his hand, as that first time, and wilfully, amiably, he lifted her to the seat. "No, no!" she cried, rising. Already he'd flung past her: he was off!

She looked back, piteously: her book—it was a child's story—fell to the ground. Saskia had lifted two clear eyes from the puddle, and stood watching them.

"I shall be back! I shall be back!" cried Redempta.

"Not to lunch," said Alex.

"I shall be cold!"

"There's a cloak of mine in the car. Would you like to put it on?"

"No, oh no! Yes, I should."

So they drove away endlessly through the wide green fields and the young green foliage. So they drove on and

on through the dreamy villages, chattering of all things—most things—that came up in young Alex's head. How foreign were all their surroundings to these French children! It did their hearts good to be French again together. Perhaps the old Parsoness, with the meekness of weakness, would have said, had she heard, that their talk was but folly—the folly of youth. The dog sat and sniffed.

She was a nuisance, of course—the black Flirt was, in the Town, amongst old curiosities and churches. Fortunately both the bipeds were most interested in lunch. That all three enjoyed thoroughly: three had chicken, and two had champagne. The strange wine swiftly saddened Redempta.

"At the Convent," she said, "everything was wicked. So, out in the world, one doesn't know."

"You know," answered Alex, hugely enjoying himself. "Everything you want to do is sure to be right."

"Do you think so?" she asked, anxiously. "Why?"

"Because you're as innocent as a dove, Redempta. It's a good thing you came out of that school."

"I don't know. Oh, no more champagne!" She jumped up. "It is late. Let us go!"

"Late? Why, it's just one o'clock! We're too early."

"Let us go! I must get back."

"All right." He rose calmly. As he lighted his cigarette, walking off to find the (too discreet) waiter, "Heavens!" he said to himself. "I'm not so much wickedder than she!"

Thus the turtle-doves departed in good time from the steeple-crowned city, indiscriminately turtling along the sun-lit road. Half an hour later Lis Doris's train glided into Zwolle Station: he changed to his little side-line, for Hoogst. The country was looking green, but the roads were deserted: he turned to his German review.

It amused him to think he would surprise them, returning two days earlier, through with his work.

"Yes," said Saskia to Job, as they strolled along, just beyond Boldam. "We expect him back on Friday."

"This is Wednesday. One day more for the young people."

"They have made their hay while the sun shone."

"I don't know about hay," Job yawned. "Picking daisies. Come along and see my building. I can't say I care about the love-affairs of babes."

"The girl will be a wife in a month!"

"The girl? Oh, yes. I was thinking of the boy. The girl is nothing to me."

"Nor to me. But she marries Lis Doris."

Job Boonbakker smiled. "So much the worse for Lis Doris. Her heart is with Alex Pareys."

"You think so?" exclaimed Saskia, losing all her air of indifference. She added: "I am sure."

"I like the idea," said Job in his softest voice.

"And your young master?"

"He is not my young master. He is the young son of my master. I like him. For him it will be fun."

Saskia walked on for some steps in silence.

"You are a devil," she said.

"Tut, tut, what expressions are these for a sensible woman! How can I be what doesn't exist? Stop talking nonsense and come to the Holst!"

"Why should I? Again?"

"Because you ought to take an interest in every part, as you're coming to live there."

"I? No indeed."

"Yes, you are. Take your time." Job stood still to contemplate the fields. "The buildings won't be ready till September. Meanwhile, I've your mother's unwilling consent."

She laughed aloud. "Do you mean to say you took the trouble to get that?"

"No, but I'm sure I have it. I don't flatter myself your mother likes me, but she likes 'respectability.'"

"Never mind: I'm of age!" said Saskia brutally. "I'm not going to marry you all the same—the Ogre of Aldervank!"

"Ah, you have heard that? Yes, you will marry me. We have much in common. We have forgiven each other a great deal. And we both hate Lis Doris."

"I love him. That is why I cannot bear to think of his marrying a fool."

"I grant that you love him. And also you would like to see him lying—eh?—with a bullet through his heart."

"A dagger," said Saskia, quickly.

"Not a bullet. Yes, perhaps you are right."

She prodded the ground with her parasol.

"But neither of these alternatives will befall," she said quietly. "A third thing will happen. He will marry the widow."

Job clutched her arm. "Woman," he hissed, "if there's a devil in me, don't wake it! He shall never live to do that!"

She shook the arm he held tight.

"You hurt me," she said. "Yes; I think the marriage will be broken off still. I hope so. Fool, what do *you* care?"

"Care! Care? All my caring for *him*!"

"Let me go! What a heart you have! Wonderful. But vindictive. Lis Doris should be told!"

"Yes," said Job, moodily. "If gold or prayers could kill him, he—he wouldn't see to-morrow's sun!"

Saskia stopped. "Gold you have, I know. Do you pray?"

"Every night, for the death of Lis Doris."

"Your god doesn't hear you. I am glad to know his health is excellent. But, really, as I said, he should be warned."

"Well, you can warn him—immediately, for he is coming along in yonder cart: I have seen him for some time."

Saskia flashed round. "In that cart?" she cried. "It's a joke? It's too far!"

"It is he. I have a good eye for Lis Doris."

They stood watching. In two minutes Lis drew up. He held out his hand to Saskia: he held it out, after a swift hesitation, to Job.

"I was sorry for you," he said, "when I heard of the

death of your master." Job scowled at the word "master" from this man to him.

"I am going straight to the Old Parsonage. Is Redempta there? Don't tell her."

"Redempta has gone out walking," replied Saskia. "She will come to the Parsonage late."

"Well, don't tell her: that's all!" Lis drove off.

Turning to her companion, Saskia saw silent laughter in his face.

"We must go to the other side!" she burst out furiously, "and warn them!"

"No, let them drive up! What a joke! You said she's got his coat on."

Saskia hastened ahead. One sentence she flung scornfully over her shoulder. "Too coarse for me!"

"By Jove, you're right," he responded, following. "Saskia Lokster, you're the wife for me, devil or man!"

She said little to him. She sat by the roadside, wearily, till the motor-car came rushing up.

"Huh? What is it? We've just met a wonderful conveyance, the Bigis'."

"Be quick! Redempta, take off that cloak. Lis Doris is back."

Thus it was that Redempta, properly clad and in a great piece of her right mind, ran, ten minutes later, into the presence of her elderly lover. She embraced him and realised, how courteous he was and how handsome, and she loved him, and a grey hair or two caught the light amongst the gold of his beard.

"Saskia told me!" She chatted, she fondled, she cheered him. She listened little to his experiences, his troubles with the hanging committee. She hardly listened to his cough. Oh, only a cold.

She tore the cloth from the picture of her beautiful self. Tired of talking, she told him she had found an Adonis.

"But I know all the villagers!" he laughed.

"It isn't villager. It's the son of the great painter Pareys."

"The son—ah!—of Yetta Pareys."

"He isn't a bit like his mother," she said.

"His mother!—I thought her very lovely in her day. She had the most beautiful laugh."

"He has that too," she said quickly.

"I shall like to see him very much. Have you spoken to him?"

"Oh, yes, I have spoken to him. Lots." She paused, fingered her gloves. "He has taken me out in his motor-car." She lifted her pure eyes to his face. The next moment she was telling him all.

"You don't mind?" she asked. "There was no harm, Saskia said. And how could there be? You're not jealous? He's nice."

"Other people might mind. Did Saskia say there was no harm?"

"Oh now, you are vexed: I hear it in your voice."

"You hear too much, Redempta. And too little. You should think."

"Oh, you are angry: I see it in your eyes."

He mastered himself. "Do not cry. Is this a home-coming? It will be all right. How could *you* know? The world says so many things that convents never hear." He drew her towards him: he kissed her on the forehead: he tried hard not to think of a motor-car flying and tooting amid an open-eyed environment taking audible notes.

He shook himself. "Let us have some tea!" he said. "Is it too early? Well, yes: I am tired."

She was pouring out the beverage—he enjoying her gracefulness—when Adonis was announced. In their flurry they both forgot to cover up the picture. The young man entered, self-possessed, and, as ever, self-centred. Sheer curiosity to see his detested rival had brought him: he proclaimed himself the bearer of his grandmother's courteous inquiries. Lis opened wide eyes.

"She hopes nothing unpleasant has hurried you home—Why, that face is—no, it isn't Mademoiselle!"

"It reminds one,—does it not?—but it is much lovelier," said Redempta, handing cups.

"It is altered, of course," said Lis gruffly. "The id is there. You, as a painter's son, will understand."

"I know nothing about painting," said Alex. "I play."

"You play! Oh, I didn't know," cried Redempta. "I love playing, I sing."

He jumped up, splashing his tea. "What do you sing? Funny things?" He opened the grand piano, which had not been touched since the stout German had sung (admirably) Strauss songs to its music. "Sentimental things?" He ran his fingers along the keys. "Ah—Bechstein?—good?"

"Oh, sentimental things. Des chants d'amour," said Redempta.

"She has no notes, no accompaniment—she doesn't sing really," put in Lis.

"I can accompany. What does she sing? Give me your tune."

Redempta, delighted, ran across from her tea-table.

"Au jardin de mon père
Les lilas sont fleuris!"

She hummed it over and over, while he caught the jingle and flung it upon the instrument. With a jerk of resigned annoyance Lis turned to the accumulations of the last few days' post.

"That is it—hum, hum, hum," cried Redempta. "La! La!" Lis wrenched off a wrapper. "Oh, how ugly, Lis!" She turned.

"I beg pardon. But your efforts are not so enchanting as all that."

"They are preparatory," laughed Alex, running on.

Lis stood engrossed by a post-card. A picture-card of one of Faff's paintings, probably a present from the

publisher, soiled, antiquated, a missive from Raff. From Raff, who never wrote a syllable more than he could help. "I am coming. I haven't travelled for years. It is my last journey. I must see. This picture will be finished in three days. Then I come."

No date, an illegible postmark.

"Hum! Hum! That is right. La! La!"

He rang the bell, tried to find out the day of the postcard's arrival. He drew blank. "Three days!" he exclaimed. "He may be here to-night!" The thought agitated him intensely. Jacob Raff! His immortal hero! His master! In his house. To see!

"Hush!" Alex started his prelude successfully. Redempta's young voice rose, triumphantly carried along:

"Au jardin de mon père
Les lilas sont fleuris.
Tous les oiseaux du monde
Viennent y faire leurs nids."

Now it changes:

"Auprès de ma blonde
Qu'il fait bon—fait bon dormir.
Auprès de ma blonde
Qu'il fait bon dormir."

"Is it not lovely?"

"Lovely! Did they teach it you at the Convent?" He played on, breaking into variations, a pretty little extempore rendering of the old-fashioned tune. Lis came forward:

"Mevrouw Donderbus will be waiting, Redempta. Let me take you across." That stopped the singing: the tone of his voice did. The three walked into the sunshine, and Redempta passed safely through her gate.

The motor-car stood by the Old Parsonage. Young Pareys turned the handle. Again and again till his olive face was crimson. The thing had got into one of its tantrums, and refused to catch on.

"Done!" said Alex, exhausted. "It's never behaved so before."

"What'll you do?" questioned Lis. "You are alone?"

"I must send a boy to Aldervank for the chauffeur."

"That will take a long time."

Alex gave a French shrug. "I must go and kick my heels at my grandmother's!"

"She won't like that." Lis made an effort. "Come into the studio. I have good cigarettes. Take your dog."

"Thanks. No, the dog must look after the motor. It has never behaved so before."

Little as Lis knew of motors, he knew that they have never behaved so before.

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LVII

LIS had made conversation. There was silence. There were sentences and pauses. And more cigarettes.

"I should like to sketch you," he said. All the time he had been wanting to say it. His fingers itched. He was no longer tired: his nerves were a-tingle with the hunger of creation. The artist faculty in him was crying at his heart, at his brain, with a physical pang. His picture stared, close beside him, half-finished: the goddess expectant, the great shrieking void. Raff was coming. It had stood thus, all these days at Munich, in his eyes as it were, getting between him and the other men's work, crying out to him that it was waiting, that it wasn't ready, that the great, empty blot must be filled! Crying out that the Adonis was lacking, lacking! There wouldn't be: there couldn't be, an Adonis. An Adonis among the peasant-boys of Boldam! He had glanced, however fruitlessly, at every young face on his journey. He would have eagerly brought a model from Munich, stopped a man in the train. The thing had become an artist's obsession. He had returned to Boldam, despairing. And Adonis waited here.

Raff was coming. The yawning gap now seemed like a huge mouth demanding to be filled. Before Raff beheld it—the great picture! the one above all, towards which, unknown, he was travelling—before then it must take shape to welcome the master: that moment, if lost, could never be reclaimed. The painter forgot who the boy was, what that boy had done, what perchance he still wished to do. He saw only the model, at last, the perfect model, the incorporate dream he was yearning to reproduce.

"May I sketch you?" he said, and fell to work like a madman. Like a madman with something of the divine frenzy. He worked on in the long evening. Alex comfortably smoked, almost silent. The chauffeur arrived and tinkered outside.

"I should like to go and speak to him," said Alex, at last.

"I beg your pardon." Lis waited impatiently till the lad came back.

"Something is wrong. He must go for a smith—get some screws. I wish Boonbakker were here."

"Your servant? I thought he was afraid of motors?"

"He is no longer our servant. Why should he be afraid? He drove a lot in Paris: he drives better than I. And knows more about them than Léon."

"The smith here is clever," comforted Lis: hoping he wouldn't be.

Alex threw himself into position with a sigh.

"I can't understand. It never happened before."

"Your mother knows?" said Lis, working. Already his sketch lay on the floor.

Alex smiled. "Certainly." "He might offer me a carriage," he thought.

"Perhaps you would like something to eat," said Lis, suddenly.

"Well—I confess, I lunched early. What is your dinner-hour?"

"I have none. I must work. I will ring."

"Shan't I put on my——"

"Please do not move! Are you not an artist's son? My man is accustomed to—— Jan, bring my dinner here. Bring it all together on a tray. Serve for one."

The man executed the order. Five minutes later: "Have you finished?" asked Lis, who had worked on.

"Well, very nearly. It's an odd meal and an odd way of eating it."

"It's not cold, I hope."

"It is not, nor—I am very glad to say—is the weather."

Lis was pitiless, reckless. Had the boy objected, he felt that he would have seized him, compelled him, called the servant to hold him fast! He must paint him, paint him as he now saw him before him, paint the texture of his skin and the colour of his eyes.

"The smith has come. It's getting a bit dark," suggested Alex.

"I didn't notice it—the dark, I mean. Shall I send for the smith?"

"Oh no, your man was quite enough," hastily replied Alex. A little later he said: "I must speak to that smith."

Lis flung down his pencils. "I suppose I ought to stop!" he said, ungraciously. "I am greatly obliged to you, of course."

"Always glad to be of service," answered Alex, amused. "It looks A one. My father, you know, painted landscape. He did very little. Ill-health. His 'Heat on the Heath' is a great thing. We have given it to the Luxembourg—the French nation."

"Ah—you have given it away?"

"To the nation. One other goes to London, and one to Amsterdam. My mother wished it. She was always so proud of my father. No wonder."

"No wonder. He left no instructions about them?"

"No; why should he?"

"Why, indeed? Will you come again to-morrow morning?"

"H'm. Very well. Does Mademoiselle Redempta take much interest in your painting?"

"Her name is Lariks. Yes, she does."

"That is a good thing, for you seem to take a devouring interest in it, yourself. I couldn't go without my dinner, not to hear Ysaye. The violin is really my instrument. Did Adonis play the violin, or only Apollo? So I am Adonis—am I?—welcomed by Venus. I like the idea. I might

come with a violin. Or in a motor-car. What an unsuitable costume for a motor-car ! ”

He was gone, till to-morrow : Lis painted on. He painted refusing to think. He drew, far into the night. Then he sat long, with his head in his hands. He must be crazy, so he told himself, now. Yet he was eager to begin again.

He took the key from his breast. On Abraham's Bosom in the dark, he slept a disordered sleep.

The boy had crept homewards upon the disabled motor. The soft evening closed in upon him : at the Holst, he stood still and called out, until a glimmering cigar-spot grew large over the hedge.

“ Something's wrong with the car.” He held up a lantern, while Job poked the creature's vitals.

“ Why, it's nothing,” said Job, turning a screw. “ They want careful handling, like women. The French were right to call 'em females.”

“ Some men are difficult enough. I like women,” replied the youth.

“ So do I—well handled. The car's all right, but your drives with the young lady have come to an end.”

“ We shall see,” answered Alex enigmatically, and whistled.

Job looked up in the dark. “ I like that,” he said, heartily. “ Serve the fellow right.”

“ I have met the fellow : he's been doing me for hours, as a Greek god.”

This was beyond Job, quite ignorant, barely able to read.

“ I don't think he's half bad : I rather took to him. But Redempta ! I have my doubts, if that marriage will ever take place ! ”

Job sprang up. “ What do you mean ? Why do you too say that ? ”

Alex had resumed his seat in the car. “ Hist ! ” he said, nodding towards the somnolent French chauffeur. “ Do other people say it ? So much the better ! ”

Job bent nearer. "So much the worse for you! They will marry, do you hear: there is not even to be a honeymoon. They will stay at Boldam. And you will make love to her. Whenever you choose."

Alex was the child of a gay city: he had heard of virtue: he had seen vice.

"Good heavens, you talk as if that pleased you!" he cried, drawing back.

"It does please me to see the young young."

"Well, you mistake my intentions. To-morrow I spend the whole day with him: I shall tell him it is a crime for him to marry that girl. Léon, allez!"

"A crime!" screamed Job—but already the car slid forward. Furiously he shouted after it: "Our own appetites are our measure of others' crimes!"

Muttering to himself anent the inevitable disagreeableness of things in general and the superfluous disagreeableness of some people in particular, Alex fiercely landed the car in the garage. Coming away from it, he met his mother and frankly told her he was in a bad temper.

"But I too am in a bad temper," she said. *That* he could not believe. Still her manner disturbed him.

"Is it true, Alex, that you have been touring all over the country alone with Miss Lariks?"

"Yes, it's true. There wasn't any harm in that."

"There was harm to the bride of Lis Doris."

"Well, old men shouldn't leave their young brides." The cruel words struck home to her.

"I don't think you realise. I have had the Baroness Bigi here, telling me. The worst ruiner of reputations in the province—ruining that girl's!"

He spoke angrily. "There will always be ruiners of reputations. They will always be ruining somebody's."

"Alex, you are unjust. Leave the horrible old woman alone. Think of the girl."

"What nonsense! Driving in an open car!"

"I hear by your voice that you are reasoning against

yourself. I have been thinking: could we do anything I don't see what." Her voice showed how she was reasoning for him.

It encouraged him. He hesitated. But then he burst out, with more vehemence: "I see what, well enough I love Redempta. I shall tell him to-morrow that I love her. That this marriage must be stopped."

He felt her hand tremble on his arm. "Does Redempta love you?" she asked.

"I don't know. I haven't asked her. But she can't love Lis Doris."

"You think that is impossible? Ah, you are pitiless!"

He stopped in amazement. "Why?"

"Never mind. You cannot do this thing, Alex. You have no right."

"Why not, pray? We owe no obligation to this Doris. On the contrary, my father told me he had done him an immense wrong."

"Who? What do you say? Who had done a wrong?"

"Mother, how nervous you are. I told you before, Doris had done my father a great wrong."

She was silent: they reached the black dark of a shrubbery. "I think you must have misunderstood that," she said then.

"How could I? It was quite towards the end. Do you mean that my father was the wrong-doer?" His turn had come to tremble, with resentment and alarm.

"Alex, you must leave Lis Doris his bride! You are so young: it is a fancy! We have wronged him enough already. You must leave him his bride!"

He cried out in the deep dark: "We—mother, is it you who have wronged him? He asked you to marry him: you refused him? Is that it? There's no wrong in that!"

"No, no: he never asked me. When I married, he was a boy, much younger than you are! Alex, spare me! I have been a good wife to your father! I—I—don't know what I'm saying: you agitate me. Alex, it cannot be! It

cannot. You have no right for a boy's foolish fancy to rob this man of his love."

"*Calme-toi*," he said with a gentle dignity. "We can speak of it again. You seem certain, the girl would choose me. I was not."

"You are young, as you say!" she retorted bitterly. "She owes him her life—all she is: but for what does that count? You have much to give, Alex, a great deal more than she!"

They emerged into the light of the house. She wearily climbed the steps.

"Promise me that you will give us time," she faltered. "Promise me to wait a day. I have not yet seen him. I must see for myself. I must try to find out."

"I will wait," he said. "A little. I will try to understand you." He went upstairs, angrily troubled. For one thing he was grateful to his mother, in that she had not spoken scornfully of the girl.

LVIII

LIS had worked for a couple of hours in the clammy May morning, when the telegraph-boy brought the message from Raff. It was seven o'clock: the telegram left him fully twelve hours before Raff would arrive at Hoogat station. He took up his pencil. His eyes were red with the night's labour and unrest: his face was worn: his hand was firm.

A faint ticking outside did not cause him to look round: he deemed it one of the blackbirds wont to come there for crumbs. But he went to draw the curtain across the little glass square that was spoiling his light, and thus he saw the one face he dreaded on earth, the red-wooden face of Job Boonbakker, peering through.

Job Boonbakker, discovered, thrust open the door so suddenly, that Lis jumped aside.

"May I pay you an early call?" grinned Job Boonbakker. He was spruce as ever, clean-shaven, black-clothed.

Lis answered Redempta's father: "Say what you have come to say. I am busy."

"Busy—ah? A fine picture. I know nothing of art." He winked his small eyes, peering at the huge, brilliant canvas. "But I know a fine woman—I beg your pardon! Short-sighted, you see."

Lis folded his arms. "Leave my pictures, if you can, Mr. Boonbakker. We have talked enough of those."

"You are quite right. May I sit down? I have walked far. Not as young as I was. Nor are you."

"However short-sighted, you would see my grey hairs."

"True. We don't like each other. You have grey hairs. Still, a young lady loves you. Lucky dog!"

"Are you come to speak of her?"

"Yes and no. Have you a good cigar?"

Lis pushed forward a box. "They're a help to conversation," said Job, "especially to a nervous man. Here goes. You know I never beat about the bush. What's this about your breaking off your engagement?"

The artist turned white, to find his innermost thought, as yet barely avowed to himself, thus suddenly flung in his face by his intimate foe. "Who speaks of my engagement?" he exclaimed.

The other smiled up at him. "Don't threaten! Everybody. The news is all over the place."

"Like the most of such news, 'tis a damnable lie."

"So much the better. It would be hard on the girl. Not that that is any business of mine, and I never touch other people's business. A good cigar! I've come about my own."

"What is it? Be brief."

"You suggested that before. I always am. I'm no talker." Job Boonbakker leant back in his arm-chair and spoke negligently: "I have only come to warn you that, whether you break off this engagement or not, you can never marry the widow of Mynheer Pareys." He got up and shut the outer door. "There's a draught," he remarked.

"What your object is in fighting and pursuing and endeavouring to ruin me, all my life long, I do not know," said Lis, forcing himself to keep calm. "I leave that in God's hands. But much of your labour is futile. And the words you have just uttered are a gratuitous insult to the wife of the one creature you loved."

Job leapt in his chair, losing all his assumed phlegm. "Leave him alone!" he cried. "Leave him alone! And me. You can't marry her, if you want to; that's all." He got up. "This interview can end. Brief enough, eh? But pregnant. We shall have our little wedding on the thirtieth of June."

He slouched, for he had never lost his peasant tread, to the door. There he said what he had come to say :

"I have a little paper at home," he snivelled. "I prefer not to carry these trifles about. It is a signed declaration, entrusted to my keeping, a solemn promise to the dying, never to marry—you!" He flung out the last word with a note of triumph. And he laughed.

"Halt!" said Lis. "I also have a word to say. In the door, if you like. You know so much: you know everything. I can say all. You know that I painted the pictures of Pareys. You stole them—I sent you the one you couldn't steal. Pareys is dead. His secret is mine."

Job came close, his face working. "Yours and mine," he breathed. "Say there's a third, and I'll kill her."

"Mevrouw Pareys suspects nothing. Had she known, do you think it would have been worth my while to do it? Hands down, man. I am not afraid of you. No one knows but I, and one supreme artist who guessed."

"Who is that?" cried Job. "No, of course you will not tell me. I am a fool—the thing I loathe most. I have bungled. Give me this secret of Pareys. For ever and ever! Swear to me by your immortal soul. Yes, you believe we've got one, and I'll let you have the paper, to tear up!"

Lis smiled bitterly. "The paper of whose existence she knows?"

"She'll forget it, when it's torn. A woman only remembers words—in writing."

"No," said Lis, humanly glad to feel this villain in his grasp at last. "My secret is mine now. I have waited long, but I claim it. I am going to give it to the world!"

"I will kill you, wherever I find you, the day after you've done it," said Job quietly.

"What will be the use of that? You can't do it before."

"Yes, I can do it before."

"There are two of us to kill. These are stupid threats. You are too sensible a man for such rubbish."

Job Boonbakker bethought himself. "You are right," he said. "It is absurd to stand here talking quietly of killing and murder. Besides, you will keep the secret, as you have kept it till now."

"Ah no," said Lis quickly. "Pareys is dead."

"His memory lives!" It was a cry from the heart, the only one, perhaps, that any creature but Odo ever heard from this man.

"His memory is in my keeping," said Job, and flung down the unfinished cigar.

"His memory is my reputation," replied Lis. "I hold it in my hand. I shall do with it what I choose. I have *you* in my power. It is best that you should clearly understand that. I need that power. For you are the father of the woman I am going to marry."

Job Boonbakker assumed an expression of extremest surprise. "Is that," he sneered, "one of those bits of gossip which you called damnable lies?"

"It is not—or no longer, I trust—a bit of gossip. *One* woman knew it. That suffices." Lis put his hand to his tired brow.

"That woman lied. I believe Mevrouw Pareys believed her, but that was from hate of me. I have no child. I never had. All those stories are lies. Prove them! I have no child."

"You admit that there were other stories," said Lis, scornfully. "I have nothing to do with those. Your manner is too vehement to be reassuring. Redempta is not like you. Thank God for that."

"She's yours. You bought her, didn't you? Cheap. She's not my child. Marry her and be happy with her. Or unhappy. Unhappy, I hope."

Lis held out his hand. "She is your child. Let us part in peace!"

The other dug both hands into his coat pockets. "No," he said. "My hand isn't worth much. But I don't give it to the man I would gladly—ay, gladly—see dead at my feet."

Lis turned, with a proud sigh, to his picture. Jo shuffled out. A couple of blackbirds fluttered away before him.

Even yet he lagged, as if he could not leave his victim.

"You're right," he said, distinctly. "You can't desert her now. Though she loves some one else. Marry and be happy." He chuckled on his way home, but with a brow of thunder. He would never know a moment of repose as long as Lis Doris lived.

Half-way, he was obliged to dash, for hiding, behind some bushes. The motor flew past him. He gazed after it. Nearly caught!

"How good of you to be so early!" said Lis, heartily when Alex entered. But, as he spoke the words, an ugly thought, unaccustomed, poisoned them. The boy must realise that this now was his only chance of much intercourse with Redempta?

"Will Miss Lariks come too?" questioned Alex. He settled himself in the pose. "I have brought a song or two. I thought she might try."

"A little more to the left!" answered Lis. "She can't sing. She has never learned."

"Oh, surely: she could sing! She has a charming voice. You are prejudiced."

"Why prejudiced, pray?" demanded Lis, sharply. "To the left."

"I don't know," answered Alex, perplexed. "I suppose I should have said 'exacting.' I think she has a charming voice. She is charming altogether."

What did it matter, this warmth in his manner, more significative than his words? He went on talking of her, evidently unable to keep clear of the subject—too manifestly smitten—well, whatever the later husband may find cause to resent, the accepted lover hardly disapproves of such tribute. Nor would the insinuations of Boonbakker have hurt Lis, had he not fought all through the torturing night with the fresh wound that formed in his own breast.

"Let us do the head!" he said, abruptly, interrupting the boy's flow of talk about the grace of a convent education. "I shouldn't like it for myself."

"I was thinking of girls," answered Alex. "If Miss Lariks isn't coming, I must have a little rest."

"I expect her about eleven. Do you really need a pause?"

"I can go on till eleven," answered Alex, who had only wanted to find out. "It's already a quarter to."

"Yes, already!" groaned the painter. "That's why we must——"

"There she is!" cried Alex. There was no mistaking the ring in his voice. He jumped up, bright and lissom, in his newly donned Norfolk jacket. And above all young Young.

"I have been promised a pause," he said.

Redempta stood studying the picture. Of art she knew as little as her father, but she could safely cry out: "Have you done all that? Enormous! I think it's beautiful!"

"Which part do you like best?" asked Lis, darkly.

"All this last bit. The head is splendid. And what a good likeness!"

Alex had also drawn nearer. "You like the rapt gaze!" he said, laughing.

Lis interrupted. "You had brought songs." He accepted the inevitable. "Let us see them. I can't give you long."

The songs proved, naturally, ultra-sentimental. The usual thing about *âme*, *flamme*, and *amour*. And with a sudden resolute resolve, as one who faces his own life or death in the looking-glass, Lis threw himself on an ottoman in a corner and let these two children reveal to him whatever still was left in them to hide. Innocently, artlessly, unconsciously they bent over the piano: they leaned towards each other, she stooping close to him so as to read the words, he looking up to her, to—to look at her.

They tried "L'anneau d'argent," which was not hackneyed in those days—a song, whose quiet story of a lifelong wedded faithfulness falls so strangely from the young lips that love to sing it. Fresh her singing might be and fortunately accurate, but even Lis, however unexact, felt that no one can sing, unless taught. He sat watching them, gathering in the evidence, drawing up his own sentence: he put on the black cap.

"Try this!" said Alex, preluding.

"Mon cœur est tout à toi: mes lèvres sont à lui!" she began: at "mes lèvres" she mistook. Lis, from his far couch, cried out in protest. Alex at once struck a final chord.

"You have heard enough?" he said, rising. "I don't wonder. We must practise."

"And seen enough," answered Lis. He said no more, but he was frightened to remark the sudden guilt in their faces, even tears in Redempta's bright eyes.

"Heavens, what a near escape from fruitless tears ever afterwards!" he reflected. Aloud he said: "Give me another hour before lunch!"

"My mother is coming to my grandmother's: I am to meet her there."

"Very well. Redempta will lunch with me. Will you not?"

"Yes," said Redempta, with trembling lips.

"Will you go and tell them?"

"Yes," said Redempta, glad to make her escape.

"Order a bottle of champagne," he called after her.

Lis kept his back to his troubled and indignant model. Painting vigorously, he threw a glance over his shoulder, and another, as he spoke.

"I give you leave," he said, "to ask her to marry you. Don't interrupt."

"But I will!" exclaimed Alex. "I have said nothing to make you speak like that to me! For I promised to keep silence. And I have."

"I give you leave," resumed Lis, painting and speaking in stabs. "I shall warn her. For her of course the match would be a brilliant one. You know she is illegitimate. You are prepared honestly to make her your wife?"

"I love her!" cried the boy. "How can I keep silent, when you talk like that to me? What's the use?"

"You love her. Good. It is a calf-love. But you ask her to marry you"—still those stabs—"Good. You are old enough—both. I have known," said Lis meditatively, "a younger love than yours that lasted through life."

"I love her; I don't want to love any one else," cried the boy.

"No; perhaps you will afterwards. That can't be helped. At any rate let the *woman* start fair! If she won't have you, well and good. Perhaps she'll want to marry me!" He laughed, but his brush was going wrong.

"She will have all I have to leave, if she does or if she doesn't," he said. "Will that do?" He couldn't await the answer the boy was struggling to make. "Go now, please," he said. "I can't paint any more." His brush dropped. "No, don't please say anything. Go!" He locked himself up with his pictures in studio and study. Till the voice of Redempta called him timidly, to lunch.

HE found her sitting by the brightly-laid table, her eyes down-cast.

"Look up!" he said cheerfully. Her quick look was as forced as his tone.

"Has Mynheer Pareys"—ah, that name—"been with you?" he asked, taking his seat.

"No. Why should he? We have nothing to say to each other," she answered, in a quivering voice.

"Well, let us have lunch." He handed her a plate and made pretence to take something for himself. "He has something to say to you," he resumed. "I told him to say it. And you—you must answer him, as your heart bids you."

She gathered strength for her reply. "My heart bids me love you," she said with a sob.

He smiled, the saddest smile of his sad, strong life. "And not him?" he said, but he would not let her seek a response. "Do you know, I have been thinking," he continued quickly, "that your two ages combined are just about mine!"

"You are my protector, my friend, I love you," she entreated.

"Yes, that is what I shall ask of you henceforth. You must love me as your friend, your protector. As your father. The word is spoken! After that nothing remains to be said."

She could not answer: her young bosom heaved.

"I shall like to think that," he went on: and his voice was really, on the whole, very steady. "I shall think always that you are kind to me and—and fond of me, very fond. Yes, you must always be good to me. God bless you, Re-

dempta. Don't cry. It was wrong of me, and worse than selfish, to expect to make you my wife."

"Oh no, no—do not speak like that!" she prayed.

"It was. Let me speak! I wanted the brightness, and the comfort and the joy in my dull old home! The whole of your life for the evening of mine. And I trespassed on your gratitude. I have had a morning too, long ago. I have loved, all along, all along! I could not even give you the love of my life." He got up. "Respect my secret!" he said, and walked to the window.

She sat playing with the fruit on her plate.

He turned at last. "I shouldn't have said it," he confessed, "but I saw no other way of helping you. Everything is all right now, isn't it? You won't speak of it again, not even to me. The thing is all dead and done, long ago, and forgotten. I am a middle-aged-father. I shall be so happy in your youth."

She would have run to him: she would have thrown her arms round his neck, but he stopped her. "Not just yet," he said, with that wan smile. "Come, we will drink to your future,—in champagne!" He filled the glasses, spilling a little wine, in the sudden thought of his unchanging loneliness. "Jacob Raff is coming to-night," he said, when they had clinked. "The great Raff, about whom I have so often told you! I am so pleased. I must go and get things ready for him!" He escaped to his room.

Redempta also had to get things ready for her expected visitor. She bathed her eyes: she did her hair: she changed her frock.

Through the long and noiseless afternoon, in the calm light of the lofty studio, Lis, aroused by main force from his first lethargy, again seized at his picture. For hours he painted—in the yellow glory of flushed broom behind his Venus. She stood there, with all the young summer of the heath-land around her. And the outlined figure of the Adonis, with its half-completed head, rose in ecstasy to greet her, in an ecstasy of desire and of hope.

His servant, at the door, told, late, the arrival of her husband. He had long been expecting.

"Ask Mevrouw to join me here!" He heard a rustle and he looked round: they stood face to face.

"So we meet at last," he said stupidly.

"Lis!" she answered. She had intended to say: "How glad I am to see you!" She said it only with her eyes.

"Forgive me for such a stupid remark," he resumed.

"Stupid remarks are often best," she replied. "I also had a stupid remark, but I forgot it."

"How young you look!" he said, without removing his eyes from her face.

She laughed. "Is that a wise remark?"

"And you have kept your laugh."

"Yet I have not come here to laugh, Lis. My son has told me all. Oh, Lis, we have no right! We have no right!"

"It was I who had no right. I have told her so. Out of pure selfishness I arranged my life—the, the evening of my life—comfortably for myself."

"Are you so sure you are arranging the morning, the very early morning of his so comfortably for him?"

He laid down his brush. "I have thought of that. But there he passes beyond my help. If he chooses to lose his heart unwisely, or unsuitably, I cannot save him by marrying his love, on that account!"

"You have reasoned all that out?"

"Yes, for he is your son."

She stood studying the picture.

"I have told him—openly—that the match is brilliant, too brilliant, for her. I can understand your disappointment."

She made an impatient movement. "I care nothing. I am a poor parson's daughter." She felt that he was comparing that fact with the figure before him.

"We have no right!" she repeated wildly. "We have taken too much already of your happiness, Lis."

"What makes you say that?" he asked anxiously.

"I can't tell. I feel somehow you would have been happier, much happier, if you had never known me—or him!" She meant her husband, not her son.

"Do I not owe you everything? Can I ever repay?" he cried.

"Lis!" she said.

He saw her clench her hands, pressing them together. And suddenly he knew that she was going to speak of the thing that had been between them all these years, as a vague fear before her thoughts, as a mist, as a shape one looks away from, for it fades when you look straight!

"Lis!" she said, struggling. "He taught you to paint. That is true."

"Yes," he said, and suddenly, also, he was glad that she was going to speak.

"They say that you keep his style," she continued, gazing straight at the canvas. "I haven't lived much with painters—you know he didn't—I don't know anything of painting. I—I was very proud of his strange fame. So is Alex. But it was strange, because he painted so little, after the early work. So very little. I have had doubts sometimes, mad thoughts—yes, had I given way to them, I should have lost my wits!"

"Do not give way to them," he said gravely.

"Now that I see you again, now that I am here, I cannot help myself. They will come up. It is good that we were apart—wide apart—while he lived. He is gone, and we meet again. Ah, we meet again. Here at Boldam, Lis: here in this house!" She waited to control herself: she did not dare to look at him: her eyes were on the canvas still.

"Oh, Lis, do not tell me we must thank you for my husband's name!"

He was prepared. "What folly is this?" he said, sharply. "Is Boonbakker responsible for this?"

"No indeed, no one believes in Pareys more devotedly than his servant! Many a time he has shamed me. I owe

much to him there. I know of course that it is madness, folly, as you say, nonsense. No one dreams of such madness but I!"

"You must never dream of madness again."

She unloosed her hands. "It is only because I know nothing of painting. And because I have all my life believed so firmly in you."

"Believe in me still, I entreat you. In my feelings, if not in my powers."

"And, Lis, I have heard it repeated that you ought to have done greater work than you ever did. And when I saw the heath, our heath, reproduced as Pareys reproduced it, I wished, I often wished——"

"What did you wish?" he asked darkly.

"That you had reproduced it like that."

He burst into a laugh. "It is as if I heard Raff!" he cried. "He is coming to-night."

"I wonder what he will say of this!" she answered, pointing to the unfinished picture. "Will he say of this also, that you can paint better still?"

"I am sure he will."

"I think not. Let us wait. Let us talk of other things. Lis, may I not see the old study again?"

"Why do you want to see it? The furniture is gone."

"All the furniture?"

"No, the old sofa is there. Nothing else."

"You have kept the best bit. You have kept that. How like you! Do you remember your first box of paints—Santa Claus?"

"I have them still. They were your gift."

"I should like to see the room again. And the sofa."

"You shall see them," he said, desperately, surrendering, confident in the conquest just made. He drew the key from its hiding-place on his breast, he flung back the heavy door.

"Wait one moment:" he said: he went round lighting the many candles.

"Come!" he said.

Out of the calm brightness of the studio she passed into the illuminated night of the long deserted room. The sofa stood in its ancient place: her glance first sought it. Then her eyes travelled slowly round the picture-hung walls.

"Hush!" she said. She motioned him away from her. She turned to the scene beside her, a purple mass of heather under cloud-effects. She stood long in front of it, without a word or a gesture. Slowly she moved to the next.

He wanted to speak to her, to say something, anything—again she stopped him. "Hush!" she repeated, and gazed to the right and again to the left.

"But I must!" he broke out. "They are yours—all yours. Our heath as we lived it and loved it together! All my youth! All my memory! Awakened! All yours!"

She sank down upon "Abraham's Bosom." She covered her face with her hand. So she lay for a long moment. Then she burst into tears.

"Oh, why have you done this?" she said.

He drew near to her. In the old place, by the old sofa, in the memory-stored room.

"Because I loved you," he said. "You know it. I have loved you all my life."

She did not answer immediately. She waited till she could dry her eyes.

"And I!" she said. "All my life I have wronged you. Oh, unintentionally! I do not exaggerate unnecessary blame. I was the wife of Pareys."

"For my sake!"

She coloured. "He used to say that. It doesn't sound like an insult from you. I don't think it is correct. I wanted wealth and position: I told him so. I wanted them partly to help you. But I—I didn't love you to—to marry you. That hadn't come to me. You were a boy."

"And now I have grey hairs."

"Have you? Not many. Oh, Lis—you noble heart—how could you do this?"

"I have answered you," he said. "It was a light thing to do."

"You must not say that, Lis. I cannot hear you say it."

"I know. He is dead, but he still pursues us in death."

She lifted herself against the cushions. "How do you know?" she cried with frightened face. "Who could tell you but I?"

"Our good friend Job holds your bond."

"Ah," she said, with all her life's scorn aflame in her heart. "As if that were needed! He gave the paper to Job!" She glanced down at the hand that had written. "In those few days he never again referred to it. He had given the paper to Job." She looked up into the eyes of the man who had loved her in silence. "What mattered the promise? He did not understand that I never could marry you now!"

"I understand," said Lis. "I have wronged you by speaking. I am weak: I couldn't help it. But I know that you cannot marry me. I have felt that from the first."

"Without the promise," she said softly.

"I had hoped against hope," he exclaimed—"One does, doesn't one?—just perhaps, now, for one mad moment. Only one moment: it isn't much, for a life! If we married now, they would say you had waited. You had married for money, and Pareys had kept you waiting. They would laugh to think he had kept us waiting so long!"

"It would prove all his life-long accusation true," she said, more softly still. "Prove it at once, once for all to our son."

"I know it," he said, throwing back his head. "I have felt it. His jibes stand between us. We must keep them untrue!"

"They are untrue," she said quickly. "I have never wronged him, as he thought. I could honestly tell him that. You have been the pride and admiration of my life, Lis! But——" she laughed a poor little laugh: her white cheeks flushed scarlet. "I have never wanted to run away to you. I have loved you none the less well for that!"

"Let me be grateful for your written paper," he said, bitterly.

"No, no! Oh, Lis, bear with me and help me! What can I do more than love you and admire you as I have always done—a thousand times more? Oh, the poor pitiable dead soul, that traded on your goodness to me, your gratitude—no, not traded—that stole your fame and thereby, and thereby my affection, my pity, my endurance—all it what you can! Oh, Lis, Lis! You noble heart! You noble heart! What can I do? What can I say to show you? I can only thank you, on my knees, for a life that you made possible. I owe everything, everything to you after my own mad action in marrying. God forgive me for my robbery of your fame and of your love!"

"Dearest," he said. "We have given each other all things. Is that not happiness enough?"

"No," she said. "I can give you the greatest. I can give you back your fame!"

"Nay, the love is greatest. Give me that. The fame we can leave to your son. It were foolish, as cruel, to disturb it."

"No," she said. "No. Let right be right."

"I have as much as I care for. I have my daily trade, my daily bread. Your son's best possession is his father's great name. You have said that yourself; I also have seen it. That, and that alone, will make a man of him yet. We have talked, while I worked. Twice he said to me 'A great man's son must do something.' He feels it: he will come here, go into politics—that is his idea, work!"

"He is silent to me," she said. "I do not know of his plans."

"He is thinking them out. It is since he came to Alder-vank and realised his social position. If we make him ridiculous—ridiculous, mind, by a disgraceful *esclandre*—we drive him away—Heaven knows where—to a useless, roving life like——"

"Pareys," she said.

"We must leave him the memory of his father. That work at least remains to us."

"I cannot endure the thought. I cannot," she said.

"Yes, you can. Yes, you must. Yes, you will. See how absurd life is! Here we are talking thus, of matters too weighty for our souls to endure—and my servant is whistling at the gate. That means that I must come at once—to fetch Raff! Will you wait here, to welcome him? Or will you rather go home?"

"I will wait here," she said.

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LX

IN the calm blue evening, with the hushed air softly losing colour, Job Boonbakker drove the motor as fast as it could fly across the darkening heath. Saskia sat beside him. She must catch the train at Hoogst, for a call had come from Amsterdam, where Hendrikje, her sister, lay dying of the hairdresser's thirteenth child. Old Lokster had stopped talking about art, to remark that he could not stir, and his wife, resigned as ever, had declared she could not leave him. "For he talks," said Mevrouw Lokster, white and washed-out, "to everybody. But nobody listens but me."

So Alex had lent the motor. They could just manage to do it. There was no doubt that Job drove fearlessly well.

"And, Saskia," he began, as the small station-shed hove in sight, clear-cut in the shade, against the flat line of country.

"And, Saskia, you can avail yourself of the occasion, to get your new things in Amsterdam."

"Job, how can you speak like that! You have absolutely no heart. She may recover."

"She won't recover. But you don't think I'm such a fool as to mean mourning? Wedding-things, I mean, for our wedding at Aldervank. After the wedding at Boldam."

"You're mighty sure of both," she said with a sulky grin.

"I am. And I trust we shall be happier than Mr. and Mrs. Doris!"

"I believe you want her to be unhappy, to spite him, though I have heard it whispered, she's your child!"

"Many lies are whispered. If you say that again, I shall jerk you out of the car and declare it was an accident."

"There, Job, don't begin bullying me *before*," she said in a frightened voice. "You'll have time and opportunity enough afterwards. I may marry you, but my heart is Lis Doris's."

"I don't care about your heart. I haven't got one myself, you say. Well, I haven't. So much the better for me."

"You've a big lumpy body, and a small wicked brain."

"And a hard skull, as this road can testify. I've forgiven you, my girl, but—odd, isn't it?—I've not forgiven him!"

"I am glad I did that. It was I did it."

"Of course, I know. And I'll pay him out some day. I wish I had him here in this car."

"What would you do, if you had? Hurt yourself in endeavouring to hurt him?"

"No," he smiled, "I should try to manage better than that. But this is silly talk. He and I will never ride again together in a motor-car."

"May he be happy with Redempta!" said Saskia sincerely. "We are in time. Well, what dress would you like me to get? A white one?"

He grinned outright. "Hardly. Leave that to Redempta. You're a fine woman: get something gay. Jove, there's his cart!" They whirled on to the little gravel plot, where Lis's humble equipage already waited, with his servant at the horse's head.

"Mynheer is on the platform," said the servant, "come to meet the train from Zwolle."

"He's in time then," answered Job. For on this single line, Saskia's train, already coming into sight, must cross the down train at the farther, larger station.

"Come to meet some one?" questioned Saskia, after having hurriedly told Lis about her sister.

"Yes, no one less than Raff. I must take him to see your father."

"That is kind of you, Lis. But you like doing a kindness. I wish I did. Raff!"

"Why, you do! Didn't you come——" but she could not hear him, hurrying to be hustled by Job, into her train.

"He is expecting Raff," she said breathlessly. "Raff! the great Jacob! But perhaps you don't even know his name?"

"I do," answered Boonbakker sullenly. "Give my love to Hendrikje, if she's alive."

"She can live—and die, without it," said the woman angrily, from the carriage window.

"And you can't," he replied, as the train began to move. She leant out. "Jacob Raff," she said with slow spite, "is the greatest artist living: every one knows that he never leaves his village. But he's coming to stay with Lis Doris. What a genius he must think him to be!" She drew back her head: the train was off.

Job Boonbakker remained standing at one end of the long, narrow platform. At the other stood Lis. There was no doubt in Job's mind as to what matter of supreme importance was bringing the great painter all this way from his hermitage by the German Ocean. Had not Lis betrayed himself that very morning, when he spoke of the one master who had guessed his secret—the secret which he and that master were preparing to announce to the world!

A great madness of desperation fell upon the creature in whose animal existence one ray of soul-life had flamed through the years, as the love of a dirt-eating dog for his lord. The pent fury of a dog, with masked fangs, by the corpse. The watch and the wait of the dog, and the sudden spring at the throat!

"They shall not touch him in his grave," he said. "I could not live to know it done!"

He stood, glowering, at his end of the platform, unable to move, for the moment, unable to go back to the car.

His impotence to prevent the impending catastrophe lamed his physical strength. He saw the station-master-porter go up to Lis and confer with him: evidently there was some complication. A telegram perhaps to say the man had given up the journey. A respite! Job's heart—the one he had got—leaped. He mocked it. What availed a respite? The thing he had dreaded for months was approaching. It were better it came!

Lis walked away in the direction of the farm-house where he had got the cart last autumn in his race after Job.

The station factotum crept up along the platform. "Beg pardon, Mr. Boonbakker," he said, touching his cap, "are you motoring back past Boldam?"

"Yes," replied Job. "Do you want me to take that card?"

"How quick you are!" said the willingly admiring subordinate. "Mynheer Doris just asked me, if I had any one could go with it. I knew he'd give me a guilder: he's always that generous: so I chanced it and said yes. You see, it's only just to drop it at his house as you go by."

"Give it me. I'll do it," said Job.

"The train from Zwolle is twenty minutes over time, I told him, and he sent this message home."

"Miss Lokster will have a long wait then," answered Job indifferently. As he walked towards his motor, he read the card.

"We shall be twenty minutes late. Do not wait, if you are tired. We can come to you after dinner."

He did not doubt that the card was intended for his dead master's wife. Nor did he doubt its import. Before the day was out, the wondrously guarded secret would be hers! A secret in a woman's power was, to Job, a secret no longer. How often had he not pleaded with Pareys, that true safety depended on the death of Lis Doris, before he could hold conference with Yetta! "After you are gone, he will betray you," he had said. How often had Pareys not cried that he knew it. But what could he do?

He could not murder Lis Doris! "No, I suppose not."
"Suppose? Do you think he'd be alive, if I could?"

These memories buzzed in his ears, as he slouched through the station waiting-room: they beat, like sledge-hammers, at his scared and desolate brain. He had never been resourceful, only stupidly crafty. The spirit that had informed all his action by its hypnotising power had passed beyond him. Its influence, its knowledge, which he firmly believed to be still present, were in any case far less perceptible: he stood lord-less, waiting for a whistle, gazing right and left. The strength and the weakness of the dog were his: he could fetch and carry: he could spring wildly: he could tear limb from limb!

Suddenly there came to him the inspiration of his life. Such as it was, he followed it up. The work that had been entrusted to him he did.

He turned round in the waiting-room and crossed the line to the farm-house, where Lis was chatting with the farmer's wife. He found them in a cheese cellar, cool and shaded in the gloaming, well out of sight of the station.

"Come into my parlour, Mynheer Doris," said the farm-wife. She cast a look of distinct disapproval on the ill-famed Pacha of Aldervank.

"A word with you first!" said Job, calling him aside. The farm-wife disappeared into her pantry.

"It is true, of course, that you painted the pictures," said Job, speaking fast, against the long shelves of yellow cheeses. "It were stupid to deny it. I don't. You were paid your price. Now he is dead, you go back on the bargain."

"I decline to discuss the matter with you," said Lis, turning away.

"One moment! For some reason of your own, you have done me the cruellest injury that one human being can do another. You separated me from my—from *him*. You kept me away all those years. You sent me back only to see him die! You ask why I hate you! You ask—my God!

You have never loved and served, and *needed* as I—ask ! ”

Lis stood still, touched, for the moment, by the thrill in the man's voice.

“Keep to your part of the bargain,” said Boombak huskily. “I warn you.”

Lis threw up his head. “You are no judge of my conduct,” he said. “I have told you already, I shall act as I think best. I am sick of this atmosphere of stupidity and silly threats.” He went in search of the far wife, whose voice could be heard from the house.

“So be it ! ” said Job to himself, retracing his steps to the station. He said the words twice over : to say that he did him good.

On the gravel plot stood Lis's man-servant, fanning the gnats from the horse's restless head and superciliously examining the motor.

“The train's late ! ” growled the man. “Twenty minutes ! And the horse half mad with the gnats ! ”

“So your master feared,” replied Job, smiling nervously. “He's in a great state too about getting in so long after the dinner-hour. So I've offered to wait with the motor. You take this along at once and tell them ! ”

The man looked at his master's card, and at the horse's head. “All right,” he said. “It's like master to remember about the gnats.”

“And about the dinner-hour,” suggested Job. “Hurry up ! Mevrouw Pareys will be getting alarmed.”

The man jumped into the cart. “It is true ; they are quick ! ” he said, nodding towards the motor. “Ugly thing though. Good-night.” He drove off.

Job stood watching the dwindling spot against the dark-blue line. He drew a long breath, in swift shock. He stood thus immovable, as the moments slowly passed. He stood quite alone in the vast solitude of nature : before him the bleak, black heath : behind him the desolation of the deserted railway-shed. His arms were tight down by his

sides : his eyes were staring. He stood there in all his old uncouthness, gone limp, respectful, listening. He could not have told what he thought or saw, as the twilight very gradually lost its depths and closed in, dark upon his darkness. Unthinking and unseeing as he stood there, a form was in his eyes and a voice was in his ears. In the darkness and the dizziness he felt them. And a memory of words, heard long ago he knew not where and half forgotten, woke, resistless, in some deepest depth of his dull being: "Well done, servant—faithful servant!"—sounding on, and on, and on.

LXI

THE shriek of the engine aroused him. The long line of lights drew up with a shake—a silence—calls in the night.

A couple of dark peasant figures crept out through the station entry. "Good-evening," said one of them. He did not reply.

Then came the two men he was waiting for, Lis Doris carrying Raff's modest valise. The factotum was busy with brakes.

"What's this? Where's the cart?"

Job stepped forward. "Why, it drove away long ago," he said thickly. "The station-master asked me to let him go with your message and drive you home in the car. So I waited."

"What a muddle!" cried Lis impatiently. "That man has too much on his hands. Very good of you to wait," he added. "Such a time."

"Was it long? I didn't notice. I thought the request came from you."

"Hardly. Well, it's all a mistake. We shall reach home so much the sooner. What say you, Mynheer Raff?"

"It's years since I'd been in a train," replied Raff, who drives from his village to the city. "And I've never yet made use of a motor."

Job said nothing more. He opened the little door—at the back in those days. The valise he placed beside his seat, on the floor.

As he drove away into the soft night of the heath, his

drawn nerves seemed to loosen. A feeling came over him of tense but reasonable resolve. The voice in his ears spoke more clearly, more firmly, with the impulse of certain achievement. The mist dissolved from his eyes: the face that had filled them passed behind the retina and fixed itself, unmoving, in his brain. But the eyes themselves saw, in front of it, the bright road beneath the motor-lights—the straight stretch across the heath, with a stray rabbit flying

ACTORS

Yonder at the other end, near the village, the earthwork lay waiting, the dam from which that village takes its name. The sharp curve to the right by the clump of scrubby birches, with the gravel-pit below. It was there that Alex had nearly upset, a fortnight ago, through sheer carelessness. He had told half the village, in his fright, clamouring that the road must be changed.

"It is pleasant and convenient," said Jacob Raff, pleased.

"Such a curious coincidence!" answered Lis. "My worst, my only, enemy is driving us. The three men who know my secret are together in this car."

"Who? This person?"

"This person is the lifelong servant and devoted friend of Pareys. His dog and his slave and his friend. When I first saw them together, Pareys bade him drop a cup—and he dropped it. He was hypnotised then: he is hypnotised still."

"But Pareys is dead," objected Raff, incredulously.

"True. Don't you think that would fix the hypnotic influence? Make it less safe and more compellent? I feel sure that, if Pareys from whatever limbo his soul inhabits, were to bid this man murder me, he—he'd do it!"

"Don't you think we had better get out?" asked Raff, with a laugh.

Lis laughed also. "He hasn't bidden him yet, you see. And if he did hear such voices, perhaps he'd have the sense to know they were his own."

The man driving could not catch, in the rush of the car, a word that was uttered behind him. Nor, perhaps, had he heard in a silence, because of that ring in his ears which had risen to a roar. "Well done," it repeated, "well done, faithful servant! Faithful servant, well done!"

The motor sped on, in the black stillness of the great wide waste.

"I am so sorry we are just too late," remarked Lis in a lighter tone. "I had been hoping you would see my heath with the shades spreading down across it."

"I have come to see your heath. I shall see it in every light."

"Yes," said Lis, "you have come to see my heath. You have come all the way to see my heath. Come to see my pictures, my real pictures—the pictures I have painted with my heart. In a few moments I shall be showing them to you—at last! Showing you my real thought—my real work—the work of my life. You can't think what it means to me. You can't!"

"I can't," answered Jacob, "or I shouldn't have come."

"The others have been my pot-boilers. Well, they have sufficed. We can't make our own lives. Mine has come out like this. I haven't shaped it in any way. I've just simply followed my fate. Just simply, from the very first, followed my fate. You can't think what a comfort it is to look back on one's whole life and just say: It had to be. It came so. It was fate."

"But I can," answered Raff sympathetically.

"I'm glad I learned to work. Yes, I'm glad," pursued Doris. "I believe I did my best. But the work I loved, the work I have done for the love of it—there it is, waiting for you to see. For you to see! The world needn't have it. Let the world praise Pareys!"

"You are going to let that lie last for ever?"

"Yes, for ever. What does it matter? A hundred lies, far more far-reaching, are embedded for ever in the

history of the world. My little lie may live on! I owe that to those I began it for. What's the use of a long sacrifice one abandons in the end?"

"True," said Jacob Raff, "but the pictures——"

"The old ones will live, as the work of Pareys. The others will be destroyed at my death."

"Nay, that is a wickedness God will not allow," exclaimed Raff.

"Hush! You have not even seen them yet! Jacob, you make me tremble like a girl. You will be so disappointed!"

"I have always believed in you. Is he not going very fast?"

"It seems so to you. Yes, you have been the strength and the joy of my artist-life. I can't tell you what you have been: I should only make a fool of myself, if I said a word more. Heaven grant you find something in the pictures. No one will ever behold them, but the few who have cared."

His voice shewed him to be so moved that Raff sought a diversion. "How soft the air is!" he said. "Is the broom out? See, there comes a star!"

"Do you mean that bicycle?" asked Lis, snatching at a joke. For a light had appeared far down the road. But he couldn't keep it up, nor could Raff. They sank into brief silence, as the car rushed quivering on. Job's gaze was intent on the near distance: his hand, gripped the steering-wheel: the shouting at his ears filled his soul. He was mad, quite mad. He knew it. He was glad of it. At last life had maddened him. The life with, and out of, the dead power, Pareys!

"The few who have cared," repeated Lis. "I spoke of us three here who knew. There is one more. The woman I have loved all my life. For, like you, she guessed."

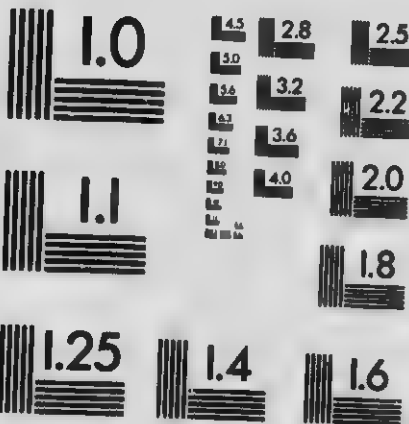
"I understand," said Raff.

"Yes, because you understand, I can speak of it. And you,—to you one can speak of a life-love! I have loved her all my life, Raff. There's a pleasure in repeating it to you."



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Loved her all these long years. Loved her for herself and for all that she did for me. When I was quite a little boy here, a poor peasant. And afterwards. I can't tell you all she did. She doesn't know herself: she denies it. Denies it to herself. After all, it's worth living for. More than to have people calling out what a great painter you are! You'll see her again in a few minutes. Do you remember? It's long ago—absurdly long ago, half a life-time. You remember my two German landscapes she'd bought? You'll see others now with her and with me!"

"And now for you both there will come a late summer," said Jacob, with solemn reminiscence of his own blasted spring.

"No, not in the sense you mean. That is ended. My summer is over: I've made one sufficient mistake. Well, I've done a lot of things that were stupid and wicked. But I've tried to be decent too. 'Stick to the Promise,' my poor father used to say. I have, in my own way. I've tried to give more than I got."

"Yes," said Jacob.

"And life's been good to me. I've been a painter: isn't that sufficient? And look at the friends I've had. Never you worry about me, Jacob! Why, your coming here's almost turned my head!"

"I don't worry, but I wish this matter would come right."

"It *has* come right. God forgive me some day as surely as I forgive that poor fellow there!"

"Even Pareys?"

"Oh, certainly and surely poor Pareys. See, those are the lights of Boldam—isn't it a small place? Just a few dozen houses with the vast heath all round them. The houses so small, and the heath so wide!"

"He drives well," said Raff. "He is slowing down a bit——"

"Yes, there's an ugly twist here. Only the other day——"

Even as Lis spoke, the car swerved. On the narrow bank they were running along Job had reached the curve by the birches. He bent forward, rigid: louder, madder than ever, the impellent injunction roared through his arteries, galvanised his nerves. "Yes," he said. "Yes, yes, yes!" He lessened his speed, as he thought, to that of the electric trams men can leap from: with a final twist of the wheel towards the gravel-pit he slipped, to the left, off his seat.

Slipped, for he had forgotten the valise: he stumbled and fell headlong across it. The unsteered car, running sideways, caught his half-protruding body and carried him along with a fling, as it upset, that hurled him six yards away into the sand-pit. Over the side it followed, borne down by its weight among the birch wood, hanging there for one terrible moment before it sank crashing into the pit.

Deserted as the place seemed to be, it was alive in a few minutes with helpless and helpful figures. The bicyclist had ridden back and given the alarm. The first few houses are close to the dam: the news spread as such news spreads: all ran out in the darkness to tell and to hear of it. The spot over the pit, over the horrible black stain against the side of the pit, was illumined by countless bicycle lights, restlessly hovering to and fro. Boys and men talked and told in hushed tones, of possibilities. The doctor was already down below.

Presently it was known to every one how matters stood. The car formed of course a shapeless ruin, two of its wheels snapped across. Job Boonbakker, the man from Aldervank, who was driving, had been tossed as by a bull on a heap of stones, his skull cloven, killed. The strange gentleman, old, with a white beard, was sitting up, bruised: he had fallen clear of the car, amongst the bushes. They were busy rescuing Mynheer Doris from under the wreck.

When that was done, at last, they carried him up the bank. A passing milk-cart, a long thing with two rows of

brass cans, had been stopped: a rough sort of couch was made with coats along one side of it: on this they laid the insensible victim, with the glittering cans upon the other side. Jacob Raff and the doctor found some sort of resting-place, to support him. Thus, in mournful procession, with the countless bicycle lamps flitting in front, and around the slow waggon, they brought Lis Doris to Boldam, home.

They carried him through the outer studio door, into the sudden light of the chapel-like room. Yetta stood there, waiting for them: the card he had written her lay on the floor.

"I want a big sofa—a bed," said the doctor, looking round.

"Is he badly hurt?—tell me that first!"

"He is more than badly hurt," answered the young doctor, a stranger to Yetta. "Where shall we put him? Those divans won't do."

"There is a large sofa like a bed in there," said Yetta, her voice shaking. "The door is locked. He—he has the key!" The three peasants stood with their burden. The wounded man groaned.

"He doesn't feel it," said the doctor quickly. "This is the key, perhaps?—I——" He wiped it with his stained pocket-handkerchief.

"We must bring it out," cried Yetta. "No one may go in there. I can drag it out! I must try. And Redempta! Where is Redempta?" She turned round: her eyes met the bright, painted Venus, the uprising Adonis, amidst the broom.

"We must make haste then," exclaimed the doctor impatiently. "He has only a few minutes to live."

"Ah!" the cry came from the old man with the soiled clothes, the torn forehead.

"Are you Jacob Raff?" said Yetta, holding out her hand. "Yes, I know you are! Open the door! Do you open it. You may open it! you. He will not mind."

"No, indeed!" said the doctor, a little roughly. "Be quick!"

Jacob, tottering forward, tried with trembling fingers to turn the lock. The doctor would have come to his assistance. "Wait a moment," said Jacob eagerly. "Let me do it!" The heavy door swung back.

"I want light—plenty of light!" said the doctor. Clasine, outwardly confident in Providence, went round to all the sconces with their numerous candles. The whole splendour of the multi-coloured walls stood out clear.

Lis Doris lay in Abraham's Bosom. His eyes were closed: his crushed breast drew its last labouring breaths.

"Let him die," said the doctor, "in peace."

Yetta, kneeling beside the sofa, turned. "He will not die!" she said passionately. "He cannot die! He may not die!"

"Thank God he can," said the doctor.

She had put her arms round the unconscious form: she laid her cheek against his cheek. At those words of the doctor she grew still.

So they waited in silence, for some few long minutes. The doctor felt the weakening pulse, moistened the quivering lips.

Then, as the repose of death deepened upon him, Lis opened his eyes. They met Yetta's gaze, close against his own: then they sought and found Raff's. A great light of disburdenment filled them as they rested on the old man's form. "I am not hurt," said Raff, drawing nearer. "Do you hear me?" The doctor shook his head. "Do not ask, for he cannot answer," said the doctor in a whisper. But the dying man's eyes shone bright for one moment. He turned them, still restlessly, more restlessly, through the room to the door.

"He wants his picture!" said Yetta suddenly. "Bring it here!" In the studio waited Alex and Redempta, old Lokster and his wife, one or two others. Outside, in the

road, stood the whole village, listening awestruck, in deep murmurs, with their bicycles and carts.

"Open the door! Throw the windows wide! Give him air!" said the doctor.

The canvas was hastily detached from its framework. Alex and Redempta held it up in the inner chamber. The eyes of its painter settled calmly upon it.

They stood holding it, with arms that drooped and trembled. The night air flowed in, stirring the yellow flames of the candles. The gaze of the dying man had sought Yetta's, Yetta's alone!

So it remained till the light sank away from it. The heaving breast lay still.

"It is over," said the young doctor, with a sigh of relief. He dropped the limp wrist. He waited. Then he said again, and his voice had grown gentle: "Mevrouw, he is dead."

She did not answer. Outside, the crowd remained, a moving mass against the distant windows. In the studio had gathered the burgomaster, the minister, other, lesser notables. They conferred in whispers.

Yetta knelt motionless by the body, holding it close against her heart. Alex let the unfinished canvas sink at the dead man's feet.

"I must enter at once: it is my duty!" said a loud and self-important voice on the other side of the door. A few words of appeal from those in the inner room met with indignant refusal. The door was thrown wide open. Yetta roused herself from her changeless vision of anguish. A stout, grotesque-looking personage, in black, appeared on the threshold, a blue paper in his hand.

"I am the deceased's Notary," said this personage. "I have the deceased's orders, his most explicit orders, to enter this room alone, at the moment of his demise and to destroy its contents within the space of two hours."

"Mynheer Raff!" exclaimed Yetta. "Mynheer Raff!" Those behind the Notary pushed him forward. He

uttered an angry protest, as the little crowd swept with him into the chamber of death.

"Mevrouw," said the Burgomaster, in tones of subdued sympathy. "The Notary cannot do otherwise: he has shown me his deed. He must remove all these pictures at once. And he must destroy them."

"But what avails that," exclaimed Yetta, staggering, as she rose by the sofa, "now they have already been seen?" All stared at her in amazement. "Oh, explain to them! I cannot!" she cried to Jacob Raff.

"How can I?" asked the old man feebly: he stood damping his bruised forehead. "The pictures," he cried, "are glorious beyond any heath-land that ever was painted! Let him burn them! In God's name! Let them go!"

"Nay, such crime is unthinkable!" burst out old Lokster. "Such crime is unthinkable!" he shrieked.

"Madame, you must permit me to do my duty," remarked the Notary: and he played with the fat seals at his watch.

"He said they were mine!" she exclaimed. "He said they were mine!"

"Have you a deed?" asked the Notary. She looked from him to the bald Burgomaster. The Burgomaster solemnly nodded agreement with the Notary.

"Do, then, your duty," she said. "If law nor justice can stop you, do your duty, forsooth! Destroy all! But you can never, you shall never destroy the fame of Lis Doris! Alex, dear son,—you must help me! Nay, Alex, it is I must help you, dear! Child, we must bear the shame together! The truth will make more of a man of you than could any plastered lie! Alex, let there be an end of deceiving, of the comfort or the strength we have gained—all too long!—you and I, from a crime! Let them drag out all these and destroy them. If God will not stay them! what can I do?" She held out her hands—the famous, beautiful hands!—to Raff, to old Lokster, to her son. "See my weak hands! What can I do?"

"Mother, what is it?" faltered Alex in French.

She answered in the same language: "I must do as my heart bids."

"Surely," he said passionately. "Surely always! My father told me to tell you that shortly before his death."

"Ah, thou seest he was better than I knew!" She turned upon the others and, speaking in their tongue—

"Destroy what you will, when you will," she cried, "you can never destroy those works of Lis Doris that hang in the galleries of Europe, and bear as yet—they shall bear it no longer!—the name of—of Odo Pareys!" Her breath broke like a sob: they all heard it. She sank down by the couch. "Ah, forgive me—forgive me, Lis! See, even *he* wished it! I have done my duty to you, and to my son!"

"What the lady says is true," affirmed Raff. He added nothing. A cry broke from Alex Pareys. "Then, if it is true, it is right it should be known!" said Alex. His hand sought Redempta's.

Yetta lifted her head, where she knelt. She pointed to the unfinished canvas. "This I claim," she said. "I purchase it at any price! It shall hang in the Museum: what say you, Raff? Unsigned, uncompleted. But all men shall know it is his!"

"It is more beautiful than I can tell you," answered Raff.

"Then carry out, *you*, all the paintings that were in this studio and burn them, if you cannot delay a moment! Not a moment? Do as your conscience commands you! But after that leave me here one hour—with him—alone!"

"My instructions allow me two," said the Notary, stalking out with offended dignity. All the others crept after him. Those that left the house told the story to the crowd.

Yetta closed the door on the silence around her. The candles stopped flickering. The long room was brilliant with colour and light.

Then again she took her place by "Abraham's Bosom," her arms around the crushed body, her face against the calm face.

"Oh, noble heart! Oh, noble heart!" she whispered. "Where there is no marrying nor giving in marriage! No marrying, no giving in marriage! Where love is, and life is, eternal! The love and the life of the spirits—the pure spirits—the pure spirits of God!"

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